The Magazine of
Comics News
& Criticism

Number 168

THE COMICS JOURNAL

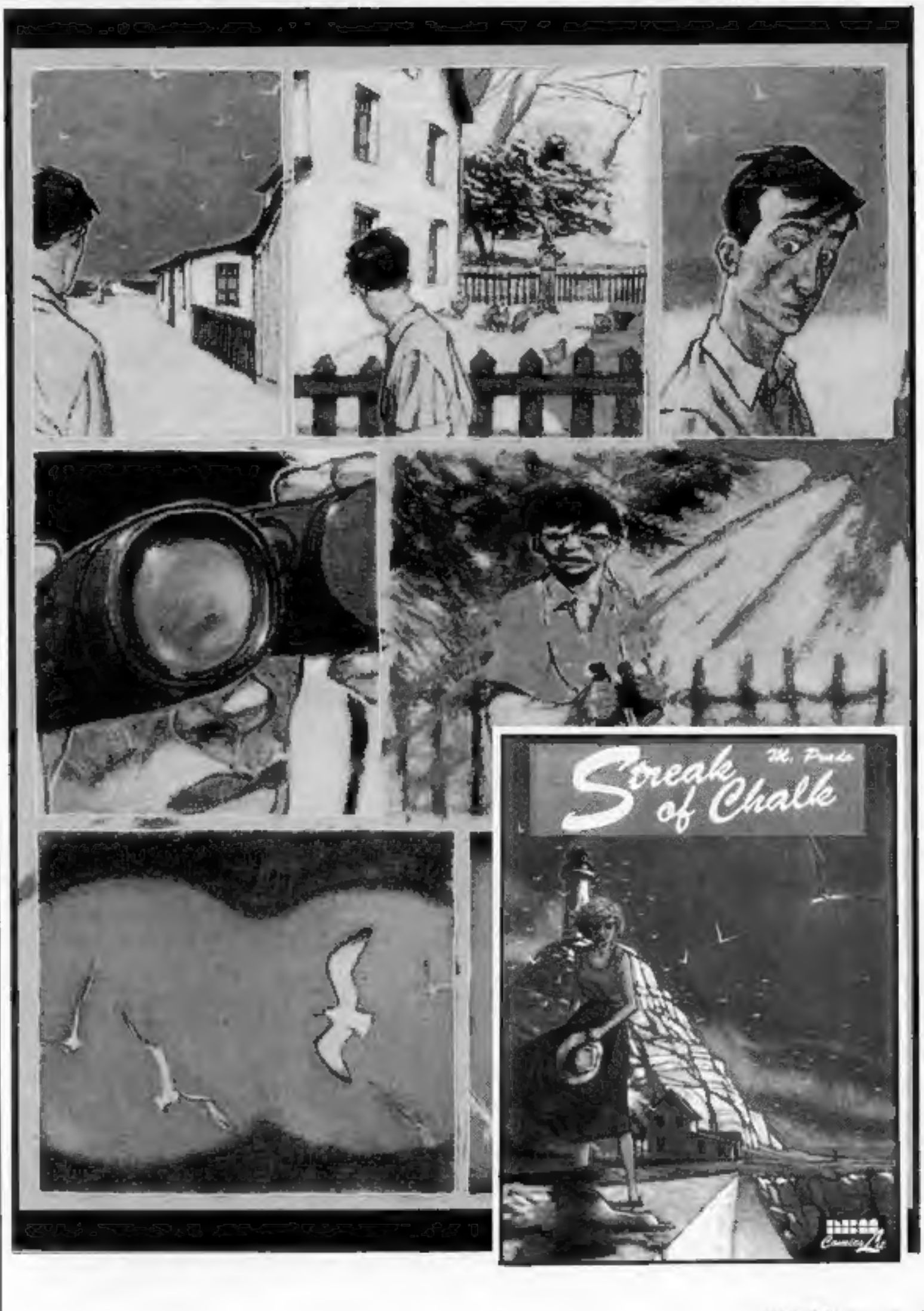
MIKE DIANA CONVICTED ON OBSCENITY CHARGES

ROBERTA GREGORY *comes clean...*

AN INTERVIEW WITH *ELFQUEST* CREATORS WENDY & RICHARD PINI

$4.95 US
$5.95 CAN

America's only comics book publisher



ANNOUNCING A NEW IMPRINT: Comics Lit

Novels in the true sense about exploring our lives, our feelings, our experiences. In comic art. In graphic novels. At times uplifting, at times controversial - always insightful and enriching. Here are the most intelligent comics the world has to offer.

COMING IN JULY!

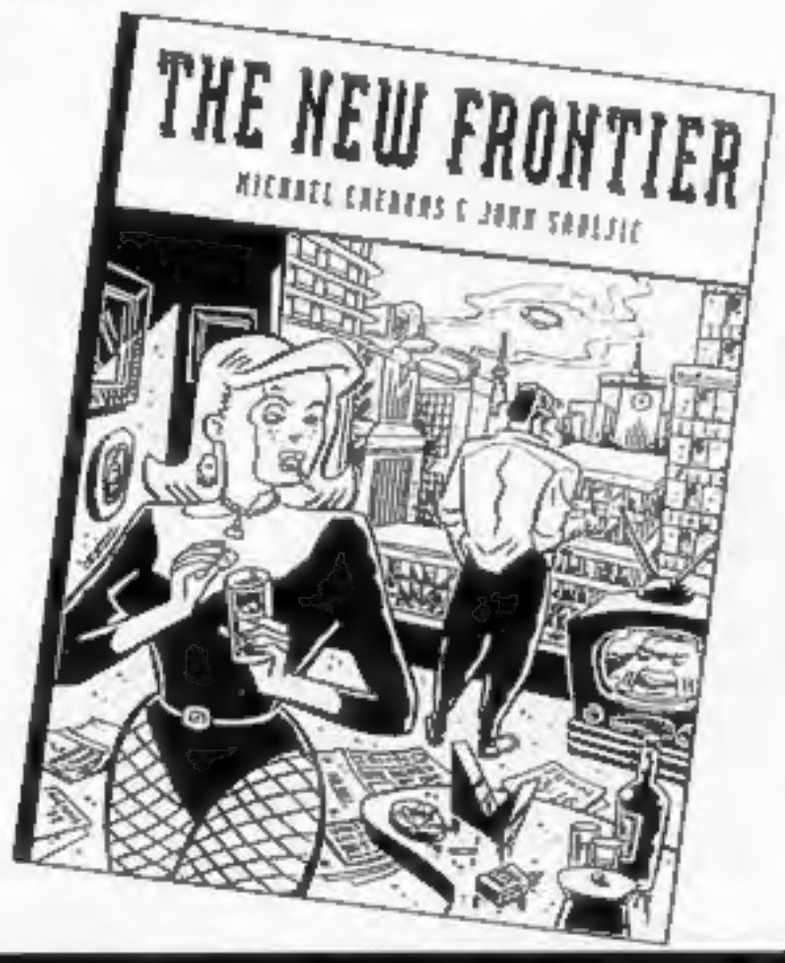
STREAK OF CHALK

Miguelanxo Prado

A small streak of an island in the Atlantic. On no map. In heavy summer heat. One general store with a woman and her taciturn boy. A lighthouse with no light. Memories and messages graffitied on the pier wall. A chance encounter with a beautiful elusive woman. A murder. Or was it? What seems real one moment is distorted the next. Only the graffitied memories are constant.

A mysterious multifaceted novel that can be read a number of ways, Streak of Chalk is sweeping Europe winning major prizes at Angouleme and other festivals. A new step in the direction of carefully crafted, intelligently written comics stories by the remarkable Spanish artist Prado.

8½x11½, 88 pp., full color, trade pb.: $15.95
ISBN 1-56163-108-6
For mature audiences.



NEW! (June)

THE NEW FRONTIER

Michael Cherkas · John Sabljic

An alternate-world satire of the grand promise of modern American pop culture, this is a tale of romance and political intrigue filled with suspense, humor, unexpected twists and a generous assortment of fatally obsessed and morally deficient characters. By the artist of The Silent Invasion and Suburban Nightmares.

8½x11, 112pp., B&W, color cover, trade pb.: $12.95
ISBN 1-56163-101-9

Add $2 P & H 1st item, $1 each addt'l.

NBM 185 Madison Ave., Ste. 1504, Dept. TCJ, NY, NY 10016 1-800-886-1223

Page 111.

CONTENTS

BLOOD & THUNDER

2 **Tarzan Troubles** Also, defense for Dan Clowes, feedback on Hogarth, and vitriol for Ellison and Florida.

OPENING SHOTS

11 **Major Headache** Lance Jacobs, publisher of Raging Rhino Productions, vents his spleen on double standards for violence in comics.

NEWSWATCH

15 **Michael Diana Convicted of Obscenity** Also, an investigation into allegations against Comic Book Legal Defense Fund board member Mitch Berger, a report from Pro/Con 2, Acclaim buys Voyager, and Walter Lantz dies at 83.

COMICS LIBRARY

47 **Victoria's Secret** Ed Shannon travels into the bowels of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell*.

49 **The Symbolism of the Ungodly** Ng Suat Tong gets to the bottom of Grant Morrison and Jon J. Muth's *The Mystery Play*.

52 **Stirring the Melting Pot** Anne Rubenstein takes in Gilbert Hernandez's *Love & Rockets X*.

54 **What It Means to Be Friends** Robert E. Sandiford investigates Jaime Hernandez's *Wigwam Bam*.

INTERVIEWS

56 **Roberta Gregory** The creator of *Naughty Bits*, *Artistic Licentiousness*, and *Winging It* talks to Anne Rubenstein about women in comics, growing up queer, and the bitch within.

77 **Wendy and Richard Pini** reveal to Conrad Stinnett and Andrew Craig their life behind the scenes at Warp Graphics while celebrating 15 years of *ElfQuest* and the expansion of their publishing empire.

SKETCHBOOK

111 **Guy Davis** Samples from the nimble pen behind *Baker Street* and *Sandman Mystery Theatre*.

COLUMNS

4 **¡Viva la Comix!** Pro/Con gossip, a Michael Allred swipe, a preview of Harvey Pekar's *Our Cancer Year*, and more!

101 **Reruns & Revivals** R.C. Harvey reviews the historic feud between *Joe Palooka*'s Ham Fisher and *Li'l Abner*'s Al Capp.

13 **Hey, Kids! Comics!** Peter Kuper relates his experiences as an expert witness for comics at Mike Diana's trial.

118 **Hit List** Only the finest in sequential narrative.

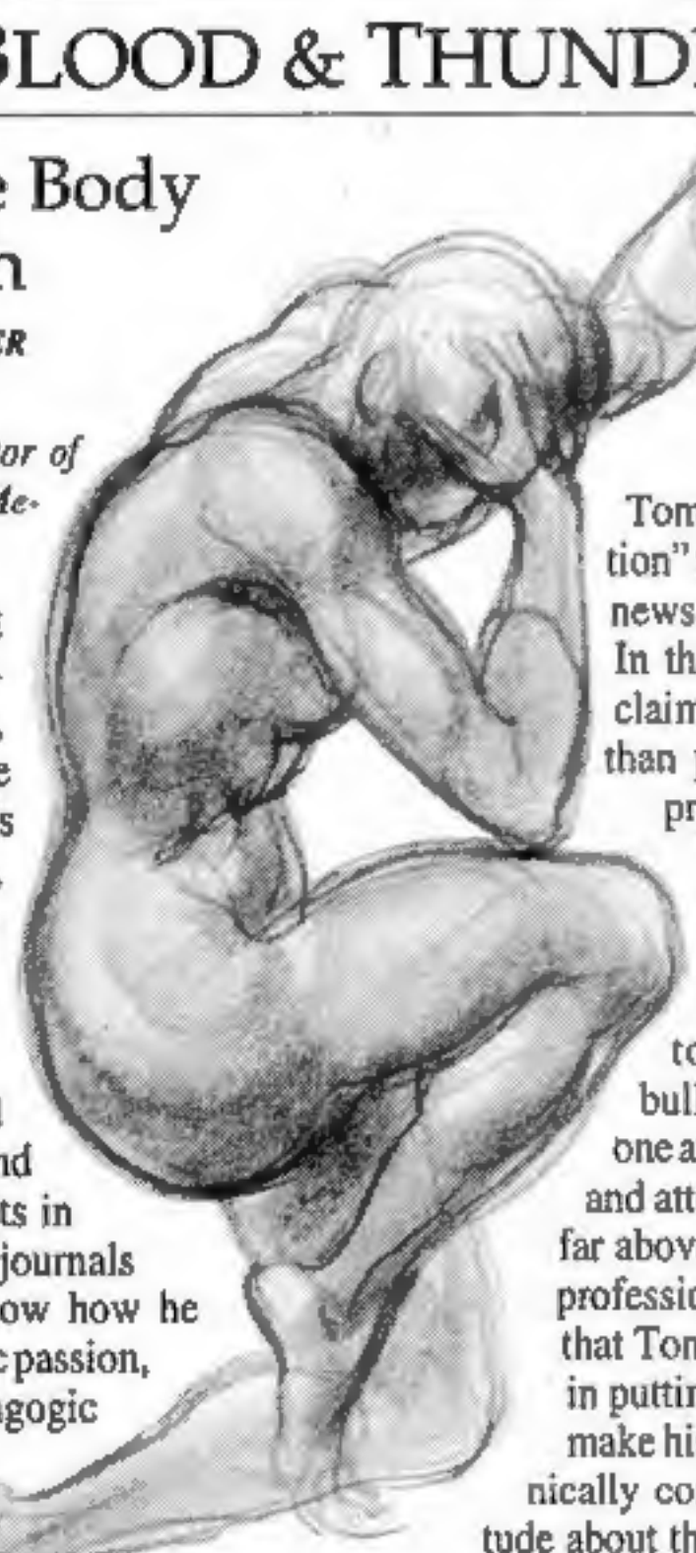
Page 56.

Page 77.

COVER ART BY ROBERTA GREGORY

BACK COVER ART BY WENDY PINI

BLOOD & THUNDER


BURNE HOGARTH

I Sing the Body Hogarth

GEORGE McWHORTER
Louisville, Kentucky

George McWhorter is curator of the Edgar Rice Burroughs Memorial Collection.

I CONGRATULATE you on a masterful interview with Burne Hogarth, one of the most articulate thinkers ever to explode his views on our generation, and I certainly look forward to publication of the second half of your heady marathon.

Having interviewed him myself several times, and published the edited results in two different Burroughs journals (in 1982 and 1991) I know how he thinks, admire his idealistic passion, and never tire of his pedagogic determination.

However, he does occasionally require editing. I don't know if the snatch of poetry (quoted on page 67 of *The Comics Journal* #166) was imperfectly recalled by him or inaccurately recorded by you, but the *Invictus* poet was William Ernest Henley (not Aldington) and the lines should run: "Out of the night that covers me, black as the Pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul." Henley (1849-1903) was crippled from bone tuberculosis but managed, by sheer will, to lead a useful and interesting life, during which his literary journals introduced to the world such brilliant writers as H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and William Butler Yeats.

I can see why Hogarth identifies with the ol' boy (who credited his survival to agnosticism), and hope our readers will forgive his memory lapse in this instance. In substance, he is correct: you'll never get very far in this world without an ego which exults in its unconquerable soul. It reminds me of the great German opera singer, Johanna Gadski who (ca. 1908) told reporters: "My voice is like a department store; it has *everything!*"

Fresh Insight

MARK WHEATLEY
Baltimore, Maryland

I AM WRITING concerning Tom Yeates' *TCJ* #164 "correction" to the "Tarzan Line Canceled" news article which ran in *TCJ* #162. In the article you quoted Tom as claiming that Heff Munson was less than professional in his efforts to proofread or correct errors in Tom's *Tarzan the Beckoning*. Tom's "correction" changed the aim of that claim to target me. And I am glad that Tom took Heff's name off the bullseye because Heff, like everyone at Insight Studios, devoted time and attention to Tom's Tarzan series far above and beyond the demands of professional standards or courtesy. In that Tom claims I "was not interested in putting out the necessary effort" to make his requested changes he is technically correct. Unfortunately, his attitude about the matter would make it seem that I was somehow less professional, attentive, or artistically concerned than I should have been. On this point Tom is wrong. He was wrong when he said it about Heff, and he is wrong saying it about me.

I should make it clear that I was brought onto the Tarzan project by a chance meeting with Tom. In spite of a vast difference in style and approach to comic art, Tom's interests in art and fiction overlap my own and we share a love for the simple adventures Edgar Rice Burroughs created. Working on Tarzan was a dream project for me and I'm sorry several of my other stories for Tarzan will probably never see print. Yet, while we worked on the Tarzan project I made sure that Insight did everything it could to create a finished comic that we would all be proud of. On Tom's series, though, there were problems.

As far as I know, this was Tom's first attempt to script an extended work on his own; his efforts were not bearing fruit. The editor, Henning Kure, did his best to rewrite Tom's politic-laden and preachy story into a dramatic adventure. In fact, Henning and Tom took *several years* to bounce the script back and forth. When I was brought onto the project, the contract with ERB Inc. for the Tarzan license was in danger of running out without a comic ever appearing. Insight was asked to create a new "first" Tarzan series to get things going and to allow Tom even more time to get his act together. At that time Henning also submitted Tom's heavily edited script to me for my input. I know Henning was hoping I would be able to

WHAT'S IT TO YEW?!

Write to Blood and Thunder
c/o The Comics Journal
7563 Lake City Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

All letters become the property of *The Comics Journal*
Please include daytime phone number for verification

THE COMICS JOURNAL
THE MAGAZINE OF COMICS NEWS & CRITICISM

PUBLISHER Fantagraphics Books
EDITOR Gary Groth
MANAGING EDITOR Scott Nybakken
NEWS EDITOR Eric Reynolds
INTERNATIONAL NEWS EDITOR Mark Thompson
SKETCHBOOK EDITOR Jeremy Pinkham
ART DIRECTOR Dale Yarger
ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR Patrick Moriarity
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT Roberta Gregory
NEWS CORRESPONDENTS Thom Powers, Eric Reynolds, Howard W. Stangroom
INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENTS Anjorin Adtyo Tayo, Jacques Boivin, Robert Boyd, Dr. Leo John de Freitas, Jacques Dutrey, Dr. John Lent, John Pint, Carlos Trillo, Dave Tulloch, Celia Wren, Fabio Zimbres
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Mark Barnette, Hugh Bonar, Robert Boyd, Mark Brett, Bruce Chrislip, David Collier, Ron Evry, R. Fiore, Mike Friedrich, Scott Gilbert, Thomas Harrington, R.C. Harvey, Leon Hunt, Jack Jackson, Gil Kane, Rich Kreiner, Andrew Langridge, Adele Levin, Bob Levin, Ray Mescallado, Chris Metzger, Pat Moriarity, Mike Moshet, Ng Suat Tong, Scott Nybakken, Jeremy Pinkham, Larry Reid, Trina Robbins, Robert Rodi, Anne Rubenstein, J.S. Russell, Robert E. Sandiford, Jim Siergey, Ed Shannon, Frank Stack, Darcy Sullivan, KimThompson, Mark Thompson, Martin Williams, Jeffrey Winbush, Jim Woodring
PROOFREADING Rebecca Bowen, Scott Nybakken, Eric Reynolds
TYPESETTING Barbara Ireland
CIRCULATION Aaron Gunderson
INTERNS Rebecca Bowen, Andrew Craig
MASCOT Inez M. Gorell
MASCOT EMERITUS Gretchen Meyer
MOTTO Baby makes three.

For **ADVERTISING INFORMATION**, call us between 10:00 am and 5:00 pm (West Coast time) at **(206) 524-1967** and ask for **LARRY REID** or **KRISTEN OLSEN.**

CONTRIBUTIONS *The Comics Journal* is always interested in receiving contributions — news and feature articles, essays, photos, cartoons, and reviews. We're especially interested in taking on news correspondents and photographers in the United States and abroad. While we can't print everything we receive, we give all contributions careful consideration, and we try to reply to submissions within six weeks. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of your contribution. Please address all contributions and requests for Writers and/or Editorial Guidelines to: The Managing Editor, *The Comics Journal*, 7563 Lake City Way N.E., Seattle, WA 98115. All letters to the editor become the property of *The Comics Journal* and may be printed whole or in part.

THE COMICS JOURNAL #168 (ISSN 0194-7869) May 1994. Published monthly by Fantagraphics Books, Inc., from the editorial and business offices at 7563 Lake City Way, N.E., Seattle, WA 98115. The Comics Journal is copyright © 1994 by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Unauthorized reproduction of any of its contents is prohibited by law. Second-class postage paid at Bethel, CT, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send form 3579 to THE COMICS JOURNAL, 7563 Lake City Way, N.E., Seattle, WA 98115.

find a way to break the impasse and get *The Beckoning* back on track. But the script read like a map of their own conflicted efforts to write it. I told Henning he should start over. It was obvious, to me, that Tom knew what he wanted in a Tarzan story — he just didn't know how to pull it off as a piece of entertainment. Henning didn't think starting over was an option — mainly, I believe, because Tom had been living off the advanced income for the unproduced series — and had progressed to the point of layouts for much of the series. The time to change the script in any major way was long past. Tom needed to move ahead on income-producing work. So Insight brought Heff onto the project to attempt to reconcile Tom's and Henning's conflicting intentions for the story. As it turned out, the process was a lot like what Woody Allen did with the *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* movie, where the film already existed before it was written. If we had the option of treating *The Beckoning* as a comedy, this might have yielded an entertaining result. But all of us had too much affection for Tarzan to take that approach. As it turned out, Heff was the perfect choice. He proved to be an able diplomat. He took all the faxes and letters and made reams of notes during all the phone calls (Tom liked to call Heff at home, late on Sunday nights), and Heff's polite and forbearing efforts got the project rolling. Final scripts were approved! Onward!

Then, slowly, the art began to come in. Tom is not the slowest artist in comics. But if he had made all his deadlines, Insight could have given *The Beckoning* the ten-times-over approach that we lavish on all our projects. This was impossible, as pages were not on hand to be edited on the days I had scheduled to give them attention. When they came, they were incomplete — a handful here, a handful there. Usually they were in sequence — but not always. Because of the screwed-up schedule, I had to steal time from another project (at least as deserving as Tom's) to do my "production" editing. When the art deadline was missed, the letterer would miss his open day to do the lettering. Not only that, but many times, due to our letterer's travel schedule, he arrived at our office (over an hour commute, one way) only to discover that his trip was wasted; there were no pages. Since *The Beckoning* was a monthly series running seven issues, production overlapped. Editing, lettering, blue-lining, painting were going on constantly for a number of issues. Tom was moving at a slower pace and this always put him at least one step behind. Tom could not understand that art pages he had spent years creating from layout through final inks were being lettered and painted within days of their arrival at Insight. Because the time was very tight (more so on the first two issues), as the art began to move into color production (film for blue-lines — and the blue-line art boards) we decided we would need to split the books between two colorists to make the deadline. As our two painters rushed through the pages (faster than they would like to work), they were also attempting to follow Tom's extensive notes on color. For each book, Tom's color notes were as thick a pile of paper as the script for any issue. Tom was trying to color the book himself, long-distance. I believe the painters on *The Beckoning* are two of the best in the business. But they were trained by me. Their approach closely follows my own. Tom's approach to color is not to my taste. Still, given more time, I would have insisted that we follow Tom's notes, augmenting as we could. As it was, I had to instruct our painters to read Tom's notes, be aware of his intent and then trust their instinct and get it done at top speed. Rushing along, it began to look as if we just might make the film deadline.

Of course, Tom never stopped rewriting the script. When the art was in film and blue-lines, Tom was submitting new balloons and new captions. Now, I admit, art is like that; inspiration is not bound by deadline. In fact, when I was producing Marc Hempel's and my *Breathtaker* series, we made some minor dialogue changes on the overlap film for the blue-lines. On *Breathtaker*, we even etched new art into the film of one page at the color separation stage. Of course, we were weeks ahead of the deadline at the time. We could stop the film stripping process and allow that flat to be re-scheduled for preparation. We had the time. And since the correction work was done by our own hand, on our own project, there was no extra charge incurred for the change. We are even making changes for the upcoming Vertigo *Breathtaker* collection, adding new pages to re-pace the ending. But we established a budget and scheduled the time for these changes before we agreed to go ahead with the collection. On *The Beckoning*, Tom just kept writing. He could never let go of the story and the hell with deadlines! On the first few requests for changes I went along with it and paid our letterer to create new balloons that we pasted onto the line film. The painted blue-lines began coming back into the studio. And Tom kept sending changes. Changes came after lettering was complete. Changes came after blue-lines were made, after pages were painted, even after the color art was shipped to Europe for color separations.

Now, Insight did this work on *The Beckoning* over two years ago. We have seen many other projects through the studio since then. I don't remember the details of Tom's series. But I know our policy: if there were *typos* that Tom called to our attention, and we still had the physical ability to make the correction, it was done. The point where I "was not interested in putting out the necessary effort" was the endless re-lettering of dialogue and captions as Tom continued to rewrite the script — a script that had three authors and two editors. A script that had been approved by Henning and passed the approval of ERB Inc. A script that was still a pretty lousy story but was a fine piece of diplomacy. I had no interest because I had no time in the schedule and no budget to pay for more lettering and Henning had asked me to please just get on with production. I remember that Henning backed down at least once and we re-lettered one later group of changes. All this while production raced ahead in an attempt to meet impending deadlines. But that was not enough to satisfy Tom. At the time, I explained all of this to Tom, and more than once. At the time we were all very professional and pleasant with each other. As a fellow professional, I assumed Tom understood the situation. But that seems to have changed since *The Beckoning* finally came out.

Tarzan the Beckoning was published in Europe and the USA. Here, it was subject to production problems long after it left Insight's attention. The color separations were dark and murky. Pages were out of order. And the shipping dates were missed on the last several issues. This did not make Henning or anyone at Insight happy, but we found out about it when issues were in print and we could do nothing about the problems. I'm sure Tom was frustrated. But, even more distressing, *The Beckoning* looked like the end for Tarzan. Orders for copies drifted lower and lower with each issue. And in Europe the book was just flat-out rejected by the very publishers who had asked for it in the first place. In spite of the fact that I think the story was very poor, Tom lavished a great deal of heart-felt effort on his art, as did our painters and letterer. The story looked good and that alone has sold a lot of comics over the years. The covers were weak — Tom's sense of design seemed to desert him as he struggled to learn to paint (SEMIC editors on the European edition chose to enlarge panels from the story rather than use Tom's paintings). But even this does not explain why Tom's Tarzan did not sell, as I know many fans who respond with wonder at the sight of *any* painting on the cover of a comic, good or bad. I am tempted to lay the blame on the market and all the distraction that Valiant, Image and the others were creating at the time. But I think Tom does have an explanation for his series' disappointing sales. I think Tom has the idea that, somehow, it was Insight Studios' fault. Somehow, Mark Wheatley sabotaged *his* dream project, *his* Tarzan.

Two years have passed. At parties and conventions, and now in print, Tom has been blaming Insight for destroying his art and his story. He says it to our fellow ERB fans and worse, he says it to the publishers and editors we work with in the industry. Fortunately, the people we work with who know Tom just think Tom is being Tom because they know how many times Insight has worked miracles to deliver quality. But one thing needs to be addressed. And that one thing is why I have indulged myself with this long and uncharacteristic letter. I don't want those we *don't* work with to think Tom's claim that Mark Wheatley isn't interested in doing a good job is true. The truth is, doing an *exceptional* job is my only interest.

Continued on page 7

¡Viva la Comix!

compiled by: thom powers & eric reynolds

IN OTHER words

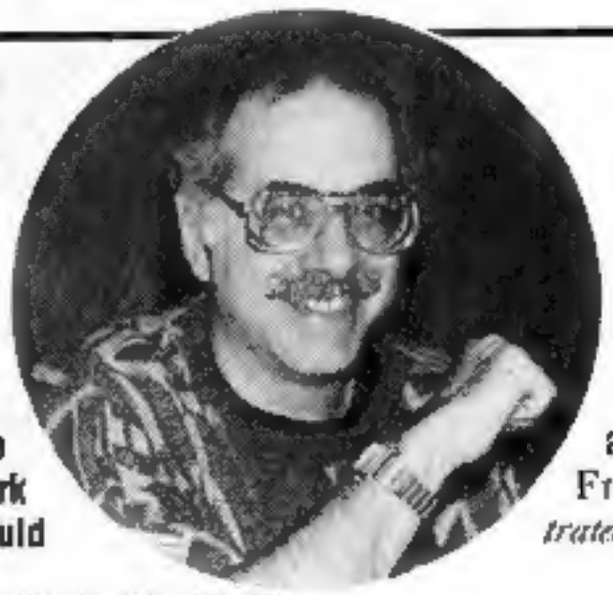
by MARK MARTIN

quota BLES

Mike Baron:
Badger: A Shattered Mirror **is a brand-new, very serious origin that deals realistically with the problems of multiple personality...**
Bob Sodaro:
When you say the serious vein, is this going to be sort of like looking at the Badger the way Kurt Busiek looked at the Marvel Universe in *Marvels*?

From an interview in *Diamond Dialogue* (May 1994).

Hero Illustrated:
Do you see Image doing what Crumb did in the '60s, showing people that if they didn't want to work for Marvel or DC that they could put out their own comics?
Larry Marder:
I sure hope so. That's what I want it to be. The sky is the limit. You really don't have to compromise yourself in any way, shape, or form.



From an interview in *Hero Illustrated* (May '94).

If you're looking for fresh work by alternative cartoonists, check out **Nickelodeon Magazine** at your local check-out counter. Every issue of this bi-monthly kids 'zine (a spin-off of the Nickelodeon TV network) contains a comic book insert featuring the likes of Richard Sala, Kaz, Heather McAdams, David Mazzucchelli, Jason Stephens, Kim & Simon Deitch, Mark Newgarden, and others. The line-up is being selected by *Nickelodeon*'s Senior Editor **Anne Bernstein**, a School of Visual Arts alum whose own comics have appeared in *Drawn & Quarterly* and *Real Girl*. "The main idea is to use people who didn't come up in the kids publishing world," Bernstein says.

Each issue she also reprints a classic comic strip by folks like Milt Gross, Harvey Kurtzman, and Ernie Bushmiller. You won't find better kids comics anywhere else.

Industry professionals gathered for two days of roundtable discussions with hopes of furthering the comics medium as an artform at **Pro/Con 2**, held in Oakland on April 20 & 21. In a panel on *self*-promotion, Malibu marketing dude **Tom Mason** was noble enough to share his infinite wisdom on the subject by articulating the value of bus stops, television spots, and cameos in Charlie Sheen movies. This was undoubtedly invaluable to Joe Creator, who eats Top Ramen noodles seven nights a week, in order to direct his hard-earned cash into multimedia advertising. Mason, however, proved more lucid than fellow panelist **Michael Davis**, the newly hired Motown Animation President, who embarrassingly mistook the panel as an opportunity to promote himself rather than to help others. Davis, an aspiring black comedian, had to bow to the dubious wit of madcap moderator and *CBG* denmother **Maggie Thompson**, who knee-slappingly remarked with tongue-in-cheek and foot-in-mouth that Davis only made the panel due to a quota. Funny, but most audience members didn't seem to get the joke.... Acclaimed comic book writer/genius **Roger Slifer** headlined a panel on "Creating a Character of Lasting Interest." Slifer, however, was guarded in revealing the secrets of his contribution to the American cultural lexicon—Lobo—opting instead to champion the multidimensional character development of his post-Lobo work on *My Little Pony*... Twice-fired **Jim Shooter** sat on a panel entitled "Career Changes in the Comic Book Industry," but his contribution was stifled by queries over whether or not the subject should be limited to *voluntary* changes. Also on the panel was Image braintrust **Jim Valentino**, who directed the discussion toward disenfranchised alternative cartoonists. Unfortunately, he forgot to bring his copy of *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*... *How to Draw Comics the Henry Ford Way* might have been a more apt title for the "Approaching the Blank Page" discussion, which featured **Norm Breyfogle** extolling the importance of leaving enough room in a panel for the letterer.... In a debate that could have gone on for seconds, journeyman **Chris Claremont** and others actually found a way to kill an hour on "The Pros and Cons of Creator Ownership".... The $75 event wasn't a total loss: two free lunches (w/dessert) and a travel alarm clock compliments of the Good Guys at Defiant.

Longtime **Journal reviewer, Robert Rodi** follows up his two earlier novels, *Fag Hag* and *Closet Case*, with a knowledgable satire of the comics industry, **What They Did to Princess Paragon** coming out this May from E.P. Dutton. The book's main characters are Brian Parrish, a gay cartoonist who turns Wonder Woman... that is, Princess Paragon, into a lesbian, and Jerome T. Kornacker, an overweight fanboy who resents the change and seeks revenge on Parrish. Comics scenesters will inevitably wonder about the real life inspirations behind supporting characters like the bad boy Brit, Nigel Cardew; the chain-smoking editor-in-chief, Heloise Frietag; and the acerbic creator of *For Spacious Skies*, Hiram Krapp...not to mention *The Comics Observer*'s iconoclastic editor, Piers Atwood.

SWIPE file

David Chelsea, *David Chelsea in Love* #3, November 1991

Michael Allred, *Madman Comics* #1, April 1994

Contributed by Barry Prior

In **Swipe File** we present two or more images, identified and dated, which resemble each other to some degree. They may be homages, parodies, ironic appropriations, or bizarre coincidences, though they're most likely just blatant rip-offs. You can make that decision yourself. Readers are encouraged to send in their favorite swipes. ●

After going through a hellish period of chemotherapy treatments for lymphoma cancer in 1990-91, *American Splendor* creator **Harvey Pekar** did what comes naturally to him: he wrote about it. The result is **Our Cancer Year**, a 224-page magnum opus co-written by Pekar and his wife **Joyce Brabner** (editor of *Real War Stories*). *American Splendor* stalwart **Frank Stack** took a year off to illustrate the book with the support of a grant from the University of Missouri where he teaches painting and drawing.

We're pleased to present the first sneak preview that anyone has seen of *Our Cancer Year*. Look for it in bookstores this fall, published by Four Walls Eight Windows.

Copyright © 1994 Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner, and Frank Stack.

Continued from page 3

Inappropriate

JOHN BOREN
Atlanta, Georgia

I REALLY ENJOYED reading Scott Russo's response to Kip Omolade. (Scott Russo is to writing what battery acid is to eyeballs.) But why did the *Journal* choose to excerpt what it did from Scott's *Jizz* comic to "illustrate" his letter? This particular excerpt, taken out of context, is easily misinterpreted to show Scott in a very negative light (in his attitudes toward black people), and to take away any credibility from the points he was trying to make. The subject of race is often addressed in his work, and I'm sure a more appropriate example could have been used.

It would make a lot more sense to me if it turned out it was *Scott's* idea to use that strip. Then I would know it was just another fine example of his dark (black?) humor.

THE EDITORS RESPOND: The art accompanying Scott Russo's letter in *TCJ* #165 was chosen by our art director without Russo's knowledge. We apologize to Russo if the art undermined his letter's well-reasoned arguments.

Clowes-Worthy

ANDY BOHRER
London, England

THIS NOTION THAT "real-life" content in comix is superior to other genres is faintly annoying. I don't agree with Joe Matt's letter in *Eightball* #12 where he says, "I do laugh my head off, but at the end I'm always left feeling, 'What was the point?'" This seems a sort of puritanical attitude, having to justify the pleasure of enjoying art. (Art is entertainment that doesn't date — my definition.) However, I reluctantly concede that "Ghostworld" is the best thing Clowes has done so far. Not because the other stuff is bad, it's just that "Ghostworld" is absolutely brilliant. Here are the "people" Mark Thompson found missing in *Velvet Glove*. This is not necessary for creating great art, but it might be necessary for Clowes: his work so far is basically satirical and seems constrained by his general disgust at the world and thus, despite its cynicism, is in danger of being preachy. This would be petty criticism indeed were it not for Clowes' remarkable graphic talent plus his (now realized) ability to do even better. The artwork too has once again greatly improved and is now living up to the promise of those beautiful "splash panel portraits" in *Velvet Glove*. The inventiveness and precision of his linear method is equal to the best continental artists and almost unique in America. (Charles Burns being the obvious exception) — I cannot accept the fannish whining of the reader's letter in #161, but Mark misses some central aspects of *Velvet Glove*. Clowes was trying to do whatever a Hollywood movie supposedly wouldn't do (or rather *not* to do what a Hollywood movie supposedly does do). Maybe he was overdoing it. *Eightball* #11 contains a wicked caricature of what a studio would do to *Velvet Glove*; to me the original seems like a *caricature of what a studio wouldn't do*. Because of that, it actually is more conventional than it looks at first. A normal "happy ending" could have been: the crippled girl sacrifices herself when saving the hero's life, who gets the girl (or more subtly, who might get the girl in a half-open ending). Instead the girl gets sacrificed and the hero is made a freak himself: the only other solution for a girl-gets-boy ending. In real life, nobody would be sacrificed and all would stay alone. I don't know what would be the most creative storyline, but Clowes' aggressive triumph of physical repulsiveness over the public's adoration of superficial beauty is fairly original. Maybe not sufficiently poetic for "jelling" with the beautiful narrative and graphic style. — Whatever, I don't want to miss anything Clowes has done and that's good enough for anyone.

Now I would like to get rid of some whining of my own by addressing one of my pet peeves: the staggering inability of the art-and-literary-establishment to acknowledge comics as worth their while. Now, I've already resigned myself to the realization that those are on the whole a bunch of complete idiots. (Idiotic in the sense that an art-talk-wise well-spoken person can be visually illiterate just as a psychologically informed person can be an emotional moron). What I can't understand is that people like *you*, who rightfully complain about quality comics not getting due attention, have themselves such a dismissive attitude. For instance, letting Crumb (who, like many geniuses before him, is not to be trusted as a critic) get away with proclaiming he doesn't understand French, but those stories aren't any good anyway. The least you could have done is ask about specific authors, like maybe Riser. How can you expect newspapers to spread your name when you can't even look out for your own? Admittedly, you would have to read a little French — torture, right?

What about devoting long interviews to the two great British cartoonists, Hunt Emerson and Posy Simmons? Another artist who does not (as Gary so charmingly puts it) "fart around," is little-known but hilarious Julie Hollings.

Granted, continentals are no less parochial when it comes to American comix, especially the most interesting ones. However, by being more open yourself, you might actually awaken interest in others.

Harlan's Blights

KEVIN J. MILLER
Elmhurst, Illinois

THANK YOU, GARY, for publishing Richard Pini's "The Big Question" [*TCJ* #164] and thank you, Richard, for writing it. The comics medium has all the publicity it needs. The challenge now is it earning the respect it should have. In less than two pages, Richard completely nails down the truth about this issue. Frankly, Gary, you've written pages and pages for the magazine dealing with this issue and, respectfully, you have not done as well with this topic as Richard does. I think, maybe, perhaps, possibly it's because Richard doesn't seem so massively personally pissed at so many people, like you so often have been in your essays. However, Richard's comments are getting wider distribution in *your* magazine. And the essays you, Gary, have written about The Big Question are at least an honest effort. The influence and presence of Gary Groth is still one of the reasons comics have made whatever artistic advances they have made in this country.

On to my second topic. In 1981, Harlan Ellison began his essay about slasher movies by writing about going to see *The Omen* at a point in his life where many personal tragedies had piled on him, Ellison describes in this essay

how when, in *The Omen*, the David Warner character gets his head cut off in slow motion, the audience responded with delighted laughter and applause. Ellison, of course, thought that such a response was, to use a term familiar to comics fans, sick, sick, sick.

A dozen years later, Ellison tells a story about physically beating the shit out of another writer because this other writer wrote something Ellison disagreed with.

(One of Ellison's favorite quotes is from Thomas Jefferson: "I have sworn eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." What do you believe Jefferson would think of Ellison's I-beat-him-because-he-disagreed-with-me story?) (I know Ellison's story is probably mostly fiction. But that's not important to the point I want to make here.)

"The thousand or so attendees frequently burst out in laughter and applause at Ellison's often vicious barbs." As near as I can tell from the *Journal* article, Ellison lapped up this response and was right in tune with the audience's mood and responses.

Ellison has turned into one of the soulless goons that he beheld with such horror in his essay about slasher movies. He might as well be considered the third part of a modern, decadent trinity that includes Howard Stern and Rush What's-His-Name. Ellison has written in the past how much he values genuine wit over less sophisticated, more popular concepts of humor. Like Howard and Rush, Ellison now apparently believes wit is the same thing as an adolescent use of character assassination.

For example, Gary, let's look at what Harlan says about you: knowing you has been a worse experience for Ellison than his four failed marriages? All that I know about Gary Groth and Harlan Ellison is this: *The Comics Journal*, in that interview, was the forum for Ellison expressing his right of free speech and he and you got sued over it. You've written some things Ellison has disagreed with. (I've also read things in the *Journal*, written by you and others, that I have disagreed with. I, however, haven't gone emotionally and psychologically thermonuclear over this fact because I know I am a citizen of a democratic society.) Ellison has written some things you have disagreed with.

That's it. And, for Ellison, knowing you has been a worse experience than four failed marriages?! How seriously does Harlan Ellison take marriage — as a concept, as an institution, practice, tradition, whatever you want to call it? I don't think he takes it seriously at all.

The Comics Journal is the only periodical in America that is pushing the idea that comics as a medium should be considered on the same level as film, literature, painting, etc. — but also, importantly, that this medium has to earn the right to be considered that way. And Ellison won't talk to you guys? I recalled in Ellison's most recent big magazine piece about comics that he talked about how important he thinks *The Comic Buyer's Guide* is. All anyone needs to know about *The Comic Buyer's Guide* is that a typical cover story is DC's Superman-Is-Dead con job, presented with unthinking and uncritical wonder, awe and delight.

Forget Ellison's Larry King appearance. Forget the intro he wrote to *Images of Omaha*. Forget him hosting the *Masters of Comics* video. How seriously does Ellison take the medium of comics? Since he won't even talk to *The Comics Journal*, I don't think he takes it seriously at all.

I guess Ellison's reply to all this would be something about how he gets laid more often than me, and makes more money than me. Or maybe he's going to fly to my hometown and ambush me at the local White Hen. Or maybe he's going to call me up and tell me what a jerk I am.

I don't know and, finally, I don't care. (Ellison is no longer the gadfly and rebel, although I do think he once was. He is right in tune with the zeitgeist: a society filled with people who, no matter what their age, are really just adolescent brutes. A society filled with people who celebrate the idealized idea of childhood not by acting child-like but by acting childish. A society filled with people ready, willing, and able to stamp into the dirt and oblivion anything and anybody that disagrees with him, that offends them, that challenges them — or, to put it more truthfully, scares them.) I know what I need to be a better person and it's got nothing to do with anything a person like Ellison could say to me or do to me.

Ellison loves *The Sandman*? So do I. My final words about him and, if he ever sees this, to him, I lift out from the first *Sandman* comic I bought. The following is from issue #14 of *The Sandman*. It was written by Neil Gaiman and is copyright 1989 by DC Comics:

"Until now, you have all sustained fantasies in which you are the maltreated heroes of your own stories. Comforting daydreams in which, ultimately, you are shown to be in the right. No more. For all of you, the dream is over. I have taken it away. For this is thy judgment on you: that you shall know, at all times, and forever, exactly what you are. And you shall know just how LITTLE that means."

An Obscene Conviction

STEVE MINDYKOWSKI
Clearwater, Florida

THIS LETTER IS REGARDING the obscenity case against Mike Diana, the artist and publisher behind the small-press comic *Boiled Angel*. I live in the same vicinity as Diana lives (in Largo), and thus I followed the Diana saga in the daily papers, ever since *The Comics Journal* printed the story on the trial in issue #162 (sorry, I didn't read #160). The case was brought to court Thursday, March 24th, 1994, and finished Monday, March 28th. During the case, art experts hired by the State of Florida deemed that the comics (#7 and #8 in particular) appeal only to those who murder and molest, only to people like Danny Rolling, who recently was recommended for the death sentence for murdering five students in Gainesville in 1990. In the end, Diana was sentenced to a $3,000 fine and three years probation, with conditions that include eight hours community service, a 40-hour work week, a requirement to take a journalism ethics course, and periodic searches to prove that he is no longer producing obscene material, even for private, personal use. This sentence was handed down in spite of testimony by Peter Kuper and Seth Friedman, experts in the field of the alternative press. David Caton, an American Family Association spokesman, said that some time in prison should've been included as well.

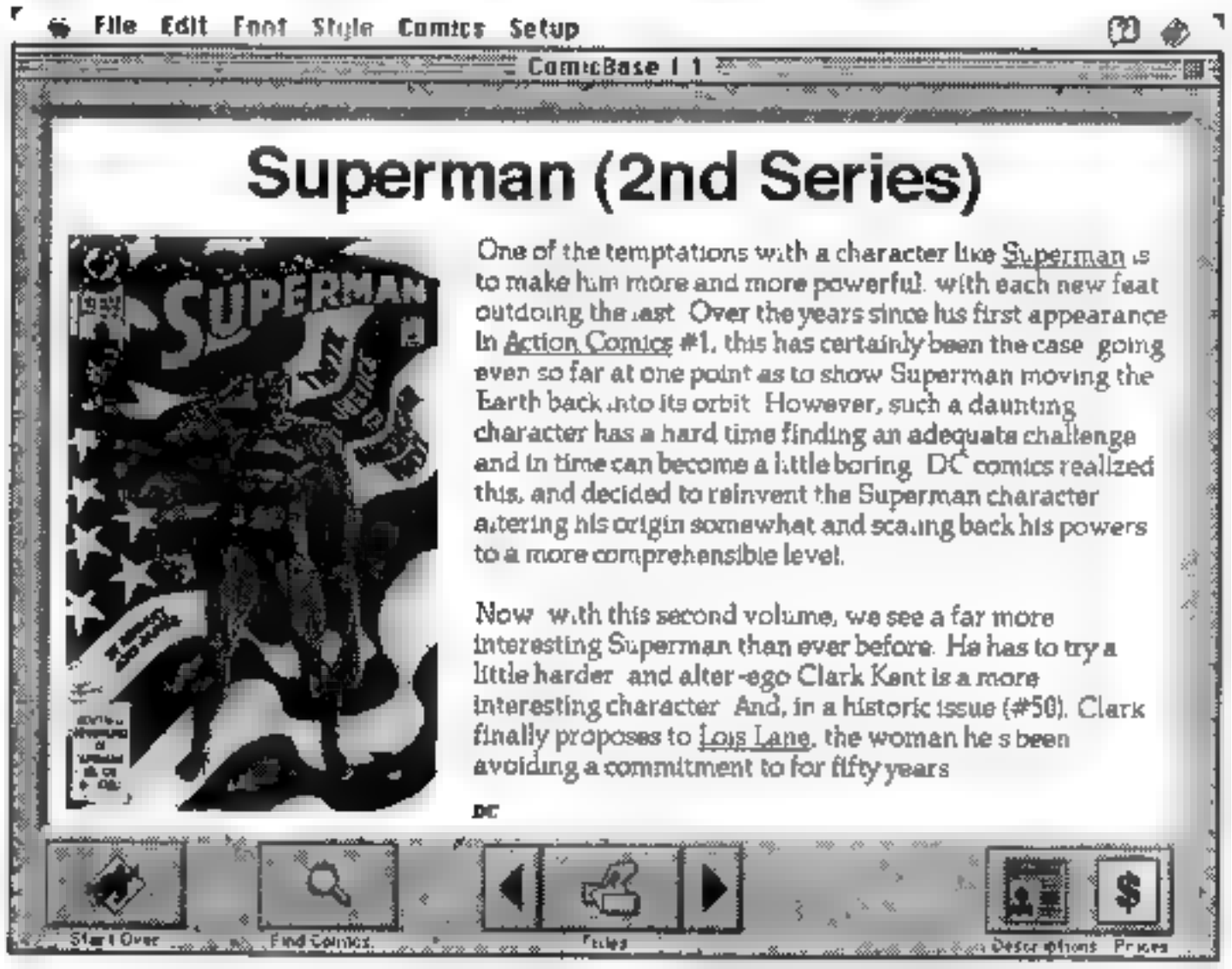
In my opinion, I don't see any wrongdoing on Diana's behalf, since he's enjoying his "Freedom of the Press" rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. I've read some of Diana's work in a couple of anthologies (*Compendium Comix Anthology* and *Snake Eyes* #3), and I think that the type of work Diana is doing is of the same quality as other alternative comics artists today. In my opinion, Roy Tompkins and Julie Doucet, as examples, are on the same level as Diana, since they, sometimes, use similar topics in their comics. Also, the Diana legacy is far from over, since an Illinois publisher will be putting out his work in a three-part series called *Superfly*, slated to start in June (this was advertised on the back of *TCJ* #163).

Also, I do not buy the fact that his comics only appeal to criminals. I myself have no criminal record, still live with my family, have a steady full-time job at a bowling alley, and am an avid collector and fan of alternative, underground, independent, and small-press comics, ranging from *American Splendor* to *Zot!*, yet I enjoyed Diana's work (that is, what was available in those two anthologies). I've been collecting these types of comics for more than three years; today, I am the same normal, polite, law-abiding citizen that I was three years ago. Diana's comics are appealing to any alternative or small-press comics fan, not just murderers.

Finally, Diana's obscenity verdict places yet another bad mark on Florida, the "Sunshine State." Florida was the home of 2 Live Crew's obscenity verdict a few years back. Also, recently, Florida passed a law banning any slander of their food grown here. In light of these facts, anything suspicious that is said, written, or drawn here is more or less subject to the approval or disapproval of the state government, regardless of "Freedom of Speech."

In conclusion, this obscenity case is in danger of collapsing the small-press industry, more or less in the same manner as in 1973, when New York City's banning of *Zap* #4 permitted the ultimate control of undergrounds, thus leading to undergrounds' collapse, since artists and publishers couldn't risk getting busted. In my opinion, we should take an active role in cherishing, proving, and protecting the Constitution now, before it becomes obscene. [For the full story of Mike Diana's conviction, see this issue's "Newswatch" section, page 15.]

The Best Software For Comic Book Lovers Just Got Better.



If you're serious about comics, you've probably heard about ComicBase, the premier comic book collecting software for Apple Macintosh® computers. ComicBase is professional strength software for people who love comics. And with new version 1.1, it's gotten even better...

Tour the comic book universe...

◀ Look up any of almost 300 titles, ranging from Golden Age classics to today's best independents. Full-color artwork and descriptions make ComicBase a virtual encyclopedia, including first appearances, key storylines, and other special issues. Hypertext links show the connection between titles with the click of a mouse

Take charge of your collection...

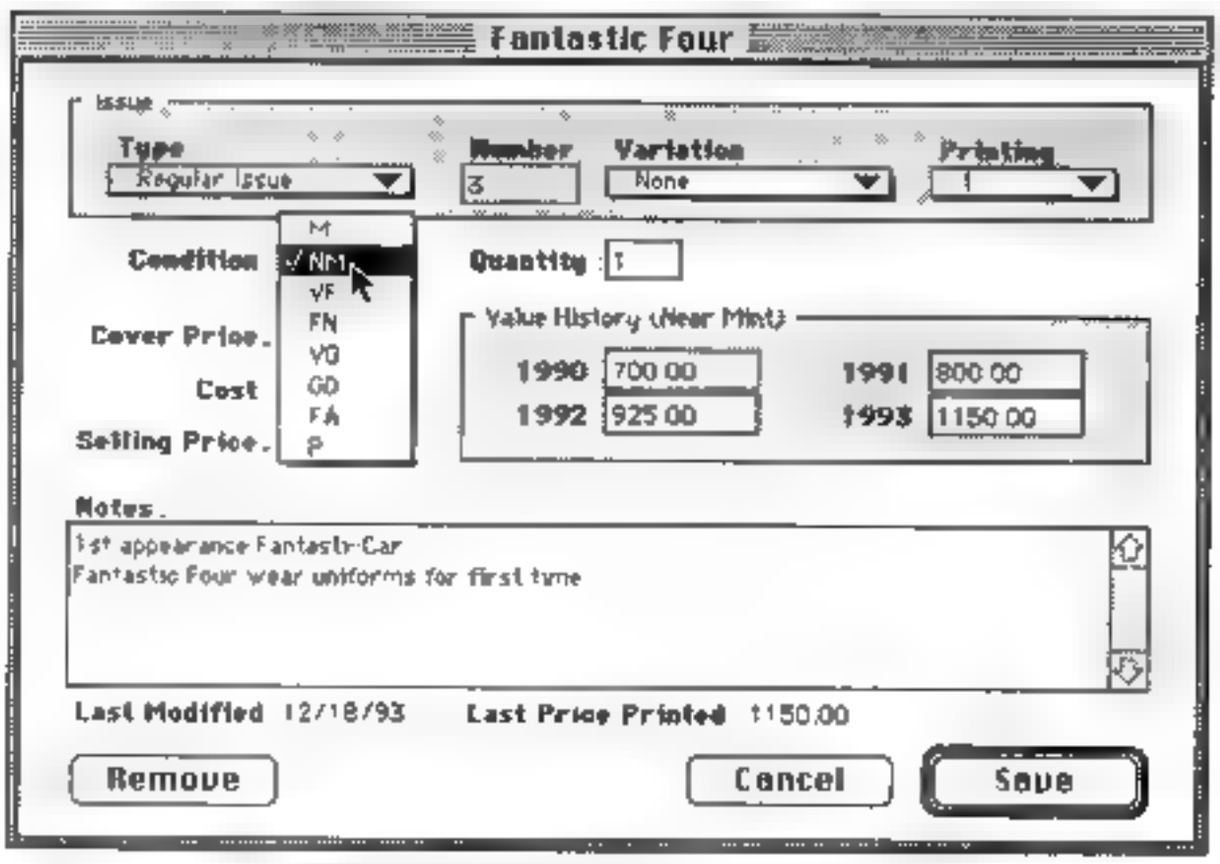
▶ Track your own collection—with a powerful database that can import and export information with virtually any other database or spreadsheet. ComicBase understands annuals, variant editions, and other special comic types, and can be extended with your own titles and artwork.

Make better investments...

ComicBase provides notes and pricing data on almost 20,000 issues—with values going back four years! Instant graphs help you determine whether a "hot" issue is a true classic, or just a passing fad.

Professional printing...

Title reports and price lists give you control over your collection. ComicBase will also generate price labels to save you time, plus title divider labels and descriptions to give your collection a professional look.



And More...

- Converts into a self-running kiosk system for shop and/or convention sales. Customers can electronically browse even the largest collection.
- New Quick Change lets you instantly enter which issues you own. Also lets you set notes and pricing information for many issues at once.
- Speed-ups and interface improvements to make managing your comics easier than ever before.

• SPECIAL BONUS •
Mention this ad when you order and receive the 5-disk Bonus Art set absolutely free!
(A $24.95 value)
Offer expires April 30th, 1994

OWN THE BEST FOR JUST $149 — CALL (408) 774-9016 TODAY!

30 day money-back guarantee if not completely satisfied.

Shipping & Handling $3.50. Demo disk available for $5. Published by Human Computing, 1605-A Ottawa Court, Sunnyvale, CA 94087

ComicBase™

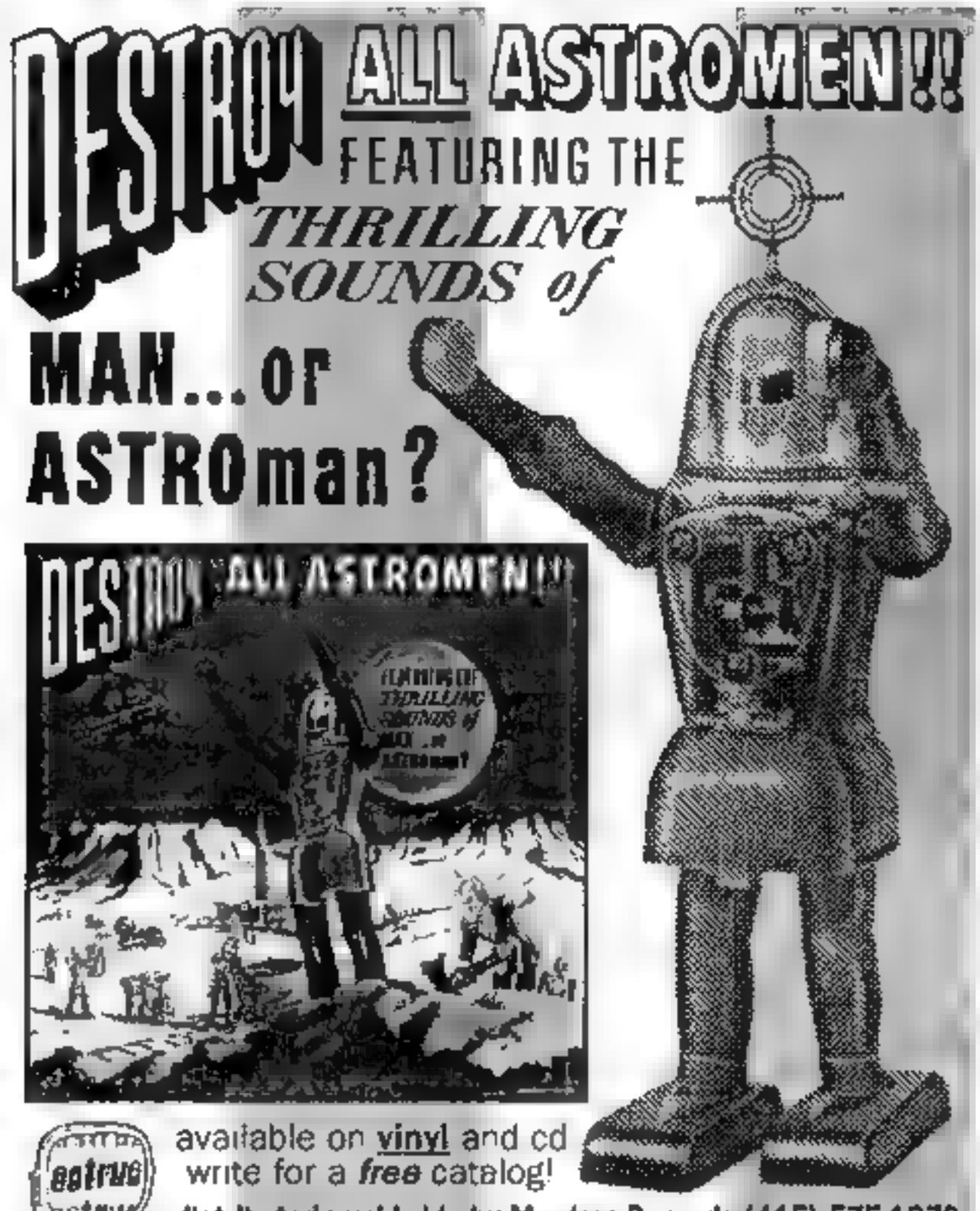
The Ultimate Software for People Who Love Comic Books™

ComicBase™ is a trademark of Human Computing. Macintosh® is a registered trademark of Apple Computer, Inc. Fantastic Four™ is a trademark of Marvel Entertainment Group. Superman™ is a trademark of DC Comics.

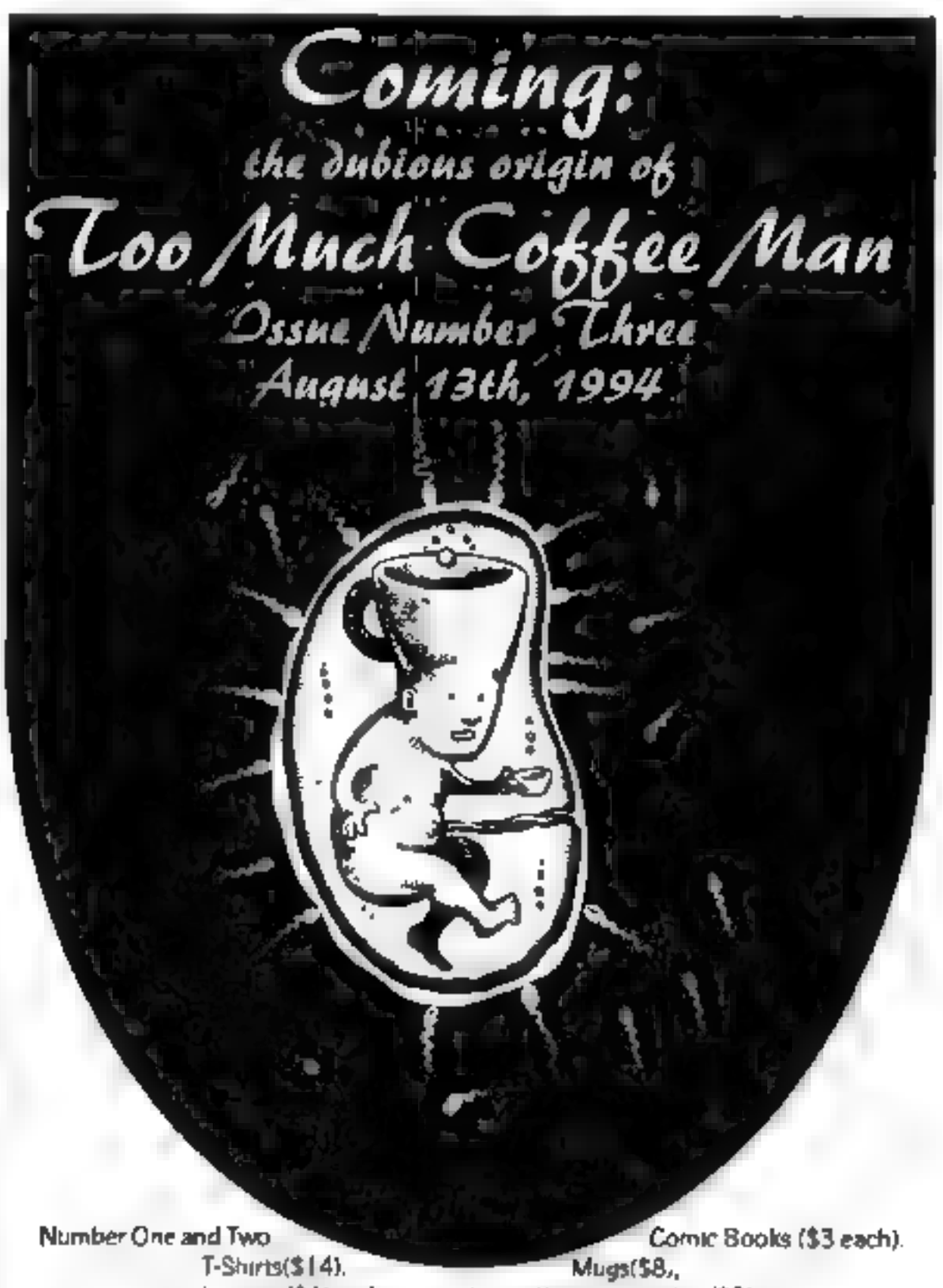
NOG IS BACK!!!!!!!! This is a collectors dream and a wonderful departure for the serious fan of cutting edge comics. NOG, The Protector of the Pyramides was published in 1981 and a lot has happened since. Finally we get the sequel that is better than the first. With the second sci-fi feature *WOLFSHEAD: PROLOGUE* created by Gary Phillips and illustrated by Dhira Yesufu. 32 pages, color cover, with black and white inside.
Featuring the Rhythmistic art and storytelling of Turtel Onli, this book presents things you have never seen or read before. His work has been favorably covered in *Comics Journal, Comics Buyer's Guide, Fox TV,* and *Associated Press* No fan, collector, or critic should be without this title. Order yours now while they last. Limited first printing.
You will receive one autographed book , a *Femme Chat* trading card, and info on the *Rhythmistic Age of Comics*

Price includes postage and handling.
Send a money-order or check for $3.00 payable to:

ONLI STUDIOS 5121 so. Ellis Ave. Chicago Il. 60615 USA
Wholesale Inquiries are encouraged. Write or call (312) 684-2280



available on vinyl and cd
write for a *free* catalog!
distributed worldwide by Mordam Records (415) 575-1970
PO Box 2125 Bellingham WA. 98227



Number One and Two Comic Books ($3 each).
T-Shirts($14). Mugs($8.,
minicomics($1) and non-contraceptive sponges too($2)
Order your copies from the June catalogs, or order direct:
Adhesive Comics/Shannon Wheeler Box 5372 Austin Tx 78763

Major Headache

By LANCE JACOBS

Lance Jacobs is the publisher of Raging Rhino Productions.

Murder is a crime. Describing murder is not. Sex is not a crime. Describing sex is.
— Gershon Legman, 1949

OR SO IT FEELS. We just finished an appearance at a local comic book convention here in South Florida. As usual, it was an eye-opening experience. This time around, our appearance came hot on the heels of an article about Raging Rhino that appeared in the *Miami Herald*, a very large, well-read and generally well-regarded newspaper. We expected something of a reaction to our being at this show, and we got one — men walking by and shaking their heads in contempt and disgust, women glancing furtively at one another and whispering, "Look, Marge, it's that dirty stuff." Lots of people walking by... walking by... walking by..

Where was this mobile crowd of South Florida comic fans headed? Why, to the table of a MAJOR PUBLISHER down the aisle from us, there to linger and stare and be generally enthralled by comics featuring this company's many spandex-clad superheroes, who between them and the villains they encounter on a monthly basis have perpetrated more sugar-coated death (it's only temporary!) and violence (nobody *really* got hurt!) than can easily be measured by mortal man. Well, we reasoned, South Florida *is* the murder and mayhem capital of the known universe. What'd we expect?

Undeterred, we came back the following day with a large number of posters and pin-ups from our new line of blood-dripping, gore-infested titles that we hope to debut in the near future. One of our new titles is named, appropriately enough, *KILLING*. The other is named *VILE*. Both books more than live up to their names. If Raging Rhino's gonna do death and violence, the people who get killed or mangled inside our books will stay that way, much like they do in real life. What's more, any Rhino book that deals with such topics will be labeled "Adults Only." We believe that powerful subjects such as death and violence are not suitable material for minors. Others may disagree, of course, and many companies have amassed large fortunes by spoon-feeding death and violence to the nation's teenaged population. So it goes.

Well, wouldn't you just know it. Less than an hour after we'd set up our booth, one of THE ARTISTS for one of the MAJOR PUBLISHERS came walking by Rhino on the way to greet his horde of assembled fans. He looked over at us, saw our poster for *KILLING* and, in a voice fairly trembling with righteous indignation, summoned forth these words: "I can't tolerate books that glorify serial killers."

Right.

Had he stayed around long enough, we might have explained to this MINOR GOD that neither can we — *KILLING* does anything but *glorify* its subject matter. That didn't happen, of course. You see, this individual is quite adept at displaying with uncanny accuracy exactly the way in which one oversized, tights-wearing freak's face will twist and grimace when it encounters the fist of another freak similarly endowed and attired. As a result, a large crowd of 12- to 14-year-old boys was anxiously awaiting his arrival.

Frankly, he couldn't be bothered with scum like us.

Jump cut to the present... I've recently noticed (with some degree of irony) an increasing number of letters appearing in comic-industry trade magazines regarding the excessive amount of random violence and gore appearing in comic books being marketed almost exclusively to children. Retailers, with good reason, have called for the publishers of this material to "clean up their act," lest the federal government do so for them. Others have called for publishers of such material to label their books as "Not Recommended for Children," a step that I, for one, wholeheartedly endorse.

I don't think that's going to happen, however. Excessive violence is the driving force behind the phenomenal sales achieved by some of these books (that's why it's there), while labeling them "For Mature Readers Only" or as "Not Recommended for Children" would deny them their primary audience. It would also impair the ability of MAJOR PUBLISHERS to *market* their violent material to the masses, which is, after all, what makes them MAJOR in the first place.

Trust me — we don't know much about being a MAJOR here at Raging Rhino, but we know all about what labeling a book does to its sales potential. When we slap an "Adults Only" label on a comic, it's instantly segregated from the rest of the comic book marketplace. Capital City pulls it out of *Advance Comics* and places it in a separate "Adult Supplement," ensuring that neither the explicit text nor graphics that accompany our books fall into the hands of children. Fine. We accept that as a condition of doing business in the direct market and, all in all, wouldn't have it any other way. We don't market our books to children, and Capital City's "Adult Supplement" puts our titles in front of only those people we do wish to reach — adults.

Even so, do I expect to see Capital City create a "Violence Supplement," something designed to keep comics containing scenes of explicit gore out of the hands of children? Not in this lifetime. Do you?

Along similar lines, Diamond will not publish any support graphics for books labeled "Adults Only," even if the graphics themselves are "G-rated." Further, Diamond will not accept advertising for "Adults Only" comics inside the pages of *Previews*. Do I expect to see MAJOR PUBLISHERS label their books "NOT FOR CHILDREN" and run the risk that Diamond will prevent them from advertising? More to the point, *would* Diamond prevent them from advertising?

Probably not (OK, definitely not), but wouldn't that put Diamond in the awkward position of claiming that ads for books clearly labeled as depicting explicit violence are acceptable in *Previews*, but that ads for books depicting explicit sexuality are not?

I'd hate to defend that position in front of a Senate hearing, wouldn't you? "Well, you see, Senator, sex is a bad thing — but all those intestines gushing from the split-open belly of that small child are essential to our bottom line — uh, that is, to the proper marketing of this

money making — uh, this very important and socially relevant work... Uh, senator, why are you laughing at me...?" Nah, better just leave them labels off, huh?

Granted, there is a huge and hopelessly gray entity known as the "Mature Reader" comic, but Capital City makes no attempt to differentiate between mature and adults only titles in its Supplier Handbook, grouping both together under the heading "Mature/Adult Readers Policy" without bothering to delineate a single difference between the two. For its part, Diamond reserves the right to judge for itself the line separating one type of comic from the other, and it does so without bothering to state its criteria in writing (not for this publisher, at any rate).

Curiously, books labeled "Mature" are permitted to remain in *Advance Comics*, while Diamond has no trouble accepting ads in *Previews* for books displaying this undefined (undefinable?) label on their covers. Despite that, we at Rhino now regard the "Mature Readers" label as little more than a loaded trap waiting to spring shut on someone, somewhere. We no longer use it on *any* of our titles. Should the industry's MAJOR PUBLISHERS decide that the "Mature" label is a perfect way to deflect growing criticism and flood this gray area with their explicitly violent books, that trap will almost surely spring shut on countless retailers across the land, leaving them defenseless when it does. What can a retailer possibly say — "Gee, officer, he looked like a very *mature* 12-year-old"? It just won't work, folks. Redefining "death" when it comes to knocking off a cherished hero in comic-book land is one thing, but I wouldn't recommend playing that game inside a court of law. As presently defined, "Mature" means jail time for he who can least afford the top lawyers. Period.

As an independent publisher of sexually explicit books marketed for adults, Raging Rhino acknowledges and accepts a responsibility to respect the mores of this society, and the labels on our books reflect that. With this acceptance, however, come marketing restrictions that — when all moral considerations are swept aside — hurt the hell out of our sales. After all, the vast majority of the nation's comic readers and retailers never *see* anything we do at the time it's being offered for sale inside the catalogs of the industry's leading distributors. We accept that. Once a handful of our books reach a retail store, the proprietor must do everything in his power to keep them from being viewed by the largest segment of the comic-buying public; namely, 12- to 14-year-old boys. We accept that as well.

But I think it's also fair to ask: Would any MAJOR PUBLISHER accept similar restrictions placed on its ability to market explicitly violent material to the widest of all possible audiences? And would any distributor be willing to force MAJOR PUBLISHERS to adhere to the *same* standards and restrictions they routinely place on us? Most importantly, perhaps, would any retailer willingly place the gore-infested titles of the MAJOR PUBLISHERS out of view and off-limits to the hordes of impressionable young minds and cash-clutching fists that put food on his table and pay his monthly rent? You tell me. Personally, my money's on that Senate hearing. Anybody wanna cover my bet?

Do I expect to see Capital City create a "Violence Supplement," something designed to keep comics containing scenes of explicit gore out of the hands of children? Not in this lifetime. Do you?

Those of you who've read this far may be asking yourself a question: "Why does Raging Rhino give a damn if a select group of MAJORS gets in a jam over labeling (or refusing to label) their explicitly violent comics?"

I'll tell you why. It was almost a year ago that the first letters started appearing in comic industry trade magazines regarding the lateness of titles being issued by the MAJORS, primarily Image. The pattern of those letters then and the pattern of the letters appearing now is eerily familiar. There was just a handful at first, most expressing shock or mild dismay, followed by absolute silence from the offenders. So the number of letters kept growing, and the shock turned to anger while the mild dismay grew into outrage. The MAJORS still maintained their silence and, if anything, shipped their books even later than before. In no time at all, the marketplace went ballistic — late books became the *only* topic being discussed, and it was discussed at maximum volume by everyone, everywhere.

During all of this, the topic of late-shipping books from alternative publishers such as Raging Rhino was never an issue. The issue was Image and a handful of other MAJORS, whose excessively late books were indeed wreaking havoc on retailers who had ordered these comics in large quantity, then watched in horror as the summer turned to fall with a large number of these comics still unshipped. When the books finally arrived in late fall, the kids were back in school and there was nobody else around who gave a damn about this mass-market fodder. Again, late-shipping books from alternative publishers were not the issue, and the retailers who had been hurt worst by late titles from the MAJORS were largely (though not necessarily) those retailers who really don't care about alternative comics any damn way.

How, then, did it come to pass that the "solution" to this problem involved a decision by the industry's primary distributors to enact policies whose most egregious and far-reaching negative effects virtually destroyed the nation's formerly vibrant corps of alternative publishers?

How did the "solution" to this problem come to involve Capital City levying fines against publishers for canceling or resoliciting titles — fines that cannot and were never intended to be levied against the MAJORS; those who could and would have retaliated by withholding choice titles or advertising revenue from *Advance Comics* until Cap City begged for mercy?

How did it come to pass that Diamond moved forward its planned 30-day cancellation window from June to March without bothering to inform independents (at least not this independent) that it was even *considering* such a move? True, Diamond claims that it "discussed this change with publishers who make up 95% of our volume, and they have given our 30-day policy their full support" — but, hell, that accounts for a whole 15 or 20 publishers, doesn't it? What about the other 160 or so who *were* in business at that time?

If the problem was one of late books from the MAJORS, and you talked it over with the MAJORS and got their blessing for a 30-day cancellation window, then fine — slap a 30-day window on the MAJORS, and slap it on hard enough to make it stick! But it didn't happen that way, did it? The people who got slapped the hardest were those who didn't even know this move was coming.

Today we see before us a playing field that, in the blink of an eye, was made so ultimately hostile to independents that it's hard to know how many yet survive. Ironically, all of this was brought about by a problem with late-shipping books from MAJOR PUBLISHERS — large, well-heeled corporations that will now grow only stronger for having created the problem in the first place. I look around today and see the first handful of letters coming in regarding overly explicit scenes of violence contained in books that are, once again, being published by the MAJORS. Am I paranoid for believing that somehow, some way, someday very soon, this too will be my problem?

Perhaps, but I can tell you this much with absolute certainty. Millions stood by and watched as a handful of publishers and distributors dismantled this industry and put it back together in a way that better serves only their *own* best interests — not yours, and certainly not mine. If those of you who read this do not demand that the perpetrators of *this* problem be the only ones inconvenienced by its solution, then the pattern of destruction will repeat itself once again. Those of us who refused to back down in the face of threatened fines and purchase orders that arrive only days ahead of cancellation notices may not be allowed to survive the next round.

It really is up to you, folks. From this day forward, you will get the comic industry you deserve, like it or not. ●

PETER KUPER

IT'S OBSCENE!!

1990 TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD FLORIDA ARTIST MIKE DIANA PHOTOCOPIES HIS COMIX ZINE 'BOILED ANGEL'...

HEH HEH

1994 MIKE IS FOUND GUILTY OF PUBLISHING, ADVERTISING, AND DISTRIBUTING OBSCENE MATERIAL, AND IS PLACED IN A MAXIMUM SECURITY JAIL FOR 3 DAYS WITHOUT BAIL AS HE AWAITS SENTENCING!

YOU GOT A PRETTY MOUTH BOY!

SO HOW THE 'HELL' DID THIS HAPPEN??

(YOU ASK)

WELL, I'LL TELL YA...

IN 1990 FLORIDA STATE OFFICIALS CAME ACROSS 'BOILED ANGEL' WHILE CHASING DOWN LEADS IN THE GAINESVILLE SERIAL MURDER CASE...

WHAT THE @&#$! IS THIS?!

AFTER TRACKING DOWN DIANA AND GIVING HIM A BLOOD TEST, INVESTIGATORS CONCLUDED THAT MIKE AND HIS ZINE HAD NOT COMMITTED THE MURDERS!

THE BLOOD TYPE DOESN'T MATCH CHIEF

YOU'RE LUCKY SON, BUT I SUGGEST YOU GET PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP!

THEY PASSED A COPY OF 'BOILED ANGEL' ALONG TO THE LOCAL SHERIFF'S OFFICE. THERE IT FELL INTO THE HANDS OF ONE OF PINELLAS COUNTY'S "INTELLIGENCE" OFFICERS...

THIS 'KRAZY' MOUSE WILL NOT ESCAPE ME!

POSING AS A ZINE FAN, THE OFFICER CORRESPONDED WITH MIKE AND ORDERED THE NEXT TWO ISSUES OF 'BOILED ANGEL'...

H-HEH, WILL GET HIM!

NEARLY TWO YEARS AFTER THEY HAD FIRST SEEN THE ZINE, THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE SUDDENLY CONCLUDED—

OH MY GOD!! THIS IS OBSCENE!!

ENTER ASSISTANT STATE ATTORNEY STUART BAGGISH (MORAL GUARDIAN)

I'M TAKING THIS SICK, ANTI-CHRISTIAN DEVIANT TO COURT!

THIS CASE COULD MAKE MY CAREER!

ON MARCH 22ND 1994 THE 'BOILED ANGEL' TRIAL BEGAN. I WAS ASKED TO FLY DOWN TO FLORIDA TO TESTIFY AS AN EXPERT COMIX AND ILLUSTRATION WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE ALONG WITH FACTSHEET FIVE EDITOR SETH FRIEDMAN, AMONG OTHERS...

THE PROSECUTION BROUGHT IN THEIR "EXPERT" ART WITNESSES FROM A LOCAL CHRISTIAN COLLEGE...!

IF EVERYTHING IS ART, THEN NOTHING IS ART!

TRUE LITERATURE HAS LIFE AFFIRMING QUALITIES.

WE'RE DUE FOR ANOTHER PERIOD OF HEAVY REPRESSION ...THE LINE HAS TO BE DRAWN SOMEWHERE!

ARTIST'S RENDITION OF THE P. WITNESSES

DURING MY TWO HOUR TESTIMONY [redacted]

I HAVE TO BE FUNNY OR HAVE A PUNCHLINE. THEY CAN DEAL WITH SERIOUS ADULT TOPICS.

MUCH OF THE ARTWORK IN BOILED ANGEL' HOLDS UP A MIRROR TO EVENTS WE SEE ON T.V. EVERY DAY

THE DEFENSE LAWYER, LUKE LIROT, MADE HIS CLOSING ARGUMENT...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIKE WHAT MICHAEL DIANA DRAWS, BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT UNLAWFUL FOR HIM TO PRODUCE.

IT COMES DOWN TO A MATTER OF TASTE

BUT BAGGISH HAD THE LAST WORD

PINELLAS COUNTY DOESN'T HAVE TO ACCEPT WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE IN THE BATH HOUSES OF SAN FRANCISCO, OR THE CRACK ALLEYS OF NEW YORK!

90 MINUTES LATER, A "JURY OF PEERS" RETURNED WITH THE VERDICT:

GUILTY!

THE SENTENCE INCLUDED:
- $3,000 FINE
- 3 YEARS PROBATION
- STAY-AWAY ORDER FROM ANYONE UNDER 18
- CANNOT CREATE ANYTHING "OBSCENE" EVEN FOR HIMSELF!
- SUBJECT TO HOUSE [redacted] WITHOUT A WARRANT TO VERIFY THAT HE COMPLIES!

For more information or **Donations to help his appeal** call Susan Alston at The COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND 1-800-992-2533

ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE VILLAGE VOICE

HEAVY METAL

AMERICA'S LEADING ILLUSTRATED FANTASY MAGAZINE PRESENTS:

Adamov's

"DAYAK: GHETTO 9"

PLUS

PHIL WINSLADE

MARK BODÉ

SEPTEMBER 1994 ISSUE
116 PAGES • PERFECT BOUND
$3.95 U.S. • $4.50 CANADA
ON SALE JULY 10TH, 1994

Michael Diana Convicted

The State of Florida convicted its second comic book industry figure in six months on March 27 when Michael Christopher Diana was found guilty by a six-member jury of publishing, distributing and advertising obscene material — two of Diana's *Boiled Angel* fanzine, #7 and #ATE [8]. This appears to be the first case in United States history in which the government has gone after a cartoonist and not just the seller of the material in question, according to Comic Book Legal Defense Fund Administrator Susan Alston. Timothy Parks, co-owner of Sarasota's Comic Book Heaven, remains in prison, having been denied bond after being found guilty earlier this year on two counts of displaying obscene material in his retail shop.

Diana's lawyers are filing an appeal, having been denied a request for a new trial on April 15. The denial for a new trial was expected, said Diana's lawyer Luke Lirot, adding that "unless there's a mistrial, the court is not going to go to the time and expense of retrying the case, otherwise you'd have people doing it all the time. It's something we did as a procedural safeguard, it was not a setback, we would have been terribly shocked if it had been granted." Lirot said he feels extremely confident regarding an appeal

The Diana trial has led to an internal investigation of CBLDF board member and Second

[continued on page 16]

LEGAL NEWS

CBLDF Member Under Fire

Mitch Berger, board member and second vice-president of the nonprofit Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF), has been accused of negligence which some say may have had some bearing on the losses CBLDF-funded cases have suffered in the last year. The CBLDF has lost its last three cases, and Berger was the primary contact for each of them. The attorneys in each case have levied specific criticisms regarding Berger's handling of his duties as liaison to attorneys, with most allegations revolving around Berger's lack of communication with those he was supposed to keep in touch with.

Fund President Denis Kitchen has begun an internal investigation to determine the veracity of the allegations made against Berger. "I don't want to prejudge [Berger] Until the inquiry is

[continued on page 22]

Vice President Mitch Berger, who faces allegations of negligence. Berger was the CBLDF liason to Diana's lawyers and reportedly did not fulfill his responsibilities as such [*see "CBLDF Member Under Fire," page 15*].

Although Diana received no jail sentence, on March 28 Pinellas County Judge Walter Fullerton gave Diana three years' probation (one year on each count), with the terms of the probation requiring him to pay a $1,000 fine on each count, undergo psychological evaluation within 30 days of sentencing, maintain full-time employment, serve eight hours of community service per week, have no contact with children under 18 years of age, take a course in journalism ethics (at Diana's cost), and create no new obscene material throughout the probation for public or personal use. Diana also must submit to periodic searches to confirm that he is not creating any new obscene work. Depending on the results of the psychological evaluation, Diana may be forced to move at least one mile away from any schools attended by minors.

Rape scene from Boiled Angel # ATE, one of the issues that were on trial.

The prosecution had requested that Diana be imprisoned for two years, calling him a community threat, but Fullerton disagreed and decided that the four days Diana served in a holding cell while awaiting the ruling and subsequent sentencing was enough, opting instead for intense psychiatric evaluation. "There is an angry young man here," Fullerton said at the sentencing. "There's a lot of anger that you need to deal with." Diana was released March 29, and could have received up to three years in jail for the three first-degree misdemeanors.

Pinellas-Pasco Assistant State Attorney Stuart Baggish told the *Journal* that he felt the sentencing "addressed the necessary concerns: he's been ordered into psychiatric evaluation and any treatment that's deemed necessary. After all, in the course of the apprehension, trial and conviction of Ted Bundy it came out that Bundy had disgusting works like *Boiled Angel* that he used to slather over. People were screaming bloody murder, 'Why didn't somebody do something about it?' In this case, something was done about it."

Diana was asked by the judge at the sentencing about his long weekend in jail. "I really didn't like it... It made me think about what I've done and what I've drawn and what I'll do in the future." When asked by Fullerton to elaborate, Diana responded, "I won't do anything that might be considered obscene."

The Pinellas County jury of three men and three women ruled that Diana's sexually violent and angry self-published 'zines were not protected by free speech because they were obscene. "Obscenity isn't really free speech," Baggish said in closing statements. "It's no more free speech than a swift kick in the groin."

Florida law defines obscenity as set by the 1973 precedent of California vs. Miller. Obscenity is that which is patently offensive and appeals to the prurient interest in sex or bodily function, and that, when taken as a sum of its parts, lacks any serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. This criteria is commonly referred to as S.L.A.P.S. The law allows individual communities to determine whether work in question has such value, but says that it should be based on the national standards as a whole.

Boiled Angel is a compilation of comics, drawings and poems that frequently attack Christianity while discussing and depicting serial murder, satanic sacrifices, necrophilia, bestiality, and cannibalism. The material came to the attention of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement when agents were investigating the murder of five young Gainesville students.

Diana was questioned and cleared of any suspicion, but agents forwarded copies of *Boiled Angel* to Pinellas sheriff's detectives who then opened their own investigation of Diana. Diana came under trial in 1993 following the sale of two copies of his 'zine to a Pinellas County sheriff's deputy in 1991 and 1992. The jury at the trial was essentially asked to decide whether the issues in question were art or ob-

Michael Christopher Diana.

scenity. It took them only 90 minutes to decide against Diana.

Diana's conviction came following a five hour testimony by Diana on the witness stand defending his material. Diana insisted that his work was not a glorification of the subject matter he covered, and that the stories, which included portrayals of rape, murder, drug use, dismemberment, ritualistic sacrifice and child abuse, were not intended to sexually arouse his readers. "I make it as ugly as possible," Diana told the jury. "I want to make it really terrifying because these things really terrify me... [I use my cartoons] like a mirror to our society, to show its problems."

"Why doesn't he hold up a mirror to himself and see that he is a part of the problem? He is putting this stuff in people's hands. Doctor, diagnose thyself," Baggish responded in his closing arguments.

Diana did offer some introspection as to why he creates the material that he does. He said that many of his drawings stem from childhood stays in the hospital for a bed-wetting problem. He added that his anti-religious themes stemmed from his father forcing him to attend church as a child, and that his depictions of child sexual abuse were encouraged by a graphic book he checked out from the library as a young boy.

DANNY ROLLING

Baggish contended that *Boiled Angel* was indicative of a type of material that would appeal to a serial killer, and frequently made references to Danny Rolling, the man who confessed to the high-profile serial murders of the five Gainesville children. Rolling was recommended for the death penalty the same week as Diana's conviction, and sources on Diana's side say that the community was not in a proper frame of mind to give him a fair trial. "This is how Danny Rolling got started," said Baggish to the jury. "Step one, you start with the drawings. Step two, you go onto the pictures. Step three is the movies. And step number four, you're into reality. You're creating these scenes in reality."

"The prosecutor kept saying that my case was similar to how Danny Rolling got started," Diana told the *Journal* after the trial. "So I think that that was on people's minds a lot, worrying that I'm going to become the next serial killer. When they first had me on the news before the trial — this was before Rolling confessed to the murders — they were talking about how I used to be a suspect in the Gainesville murders. [The prosecution] definitely played that up the whole time."

Lirot would not go as far as saying that the jury was prejudiced from the outset, but did think that the prosecution took advantage of the situation. "I can only say that the specific references to Rolling were extremely prejudicial. Here's where it went: [one witness] said that Danny Rolling started off as a voyeur — maybe true, maybe not true — but then the state, in summarizing the evidence, said, 'This is the kind of material that got Danny Rolling started.' This is clearly misstating the evidence. There's absolutely no evidence to support that."

Baggish denies that he was responsible for raising or exploiting the serial killer angle. "Anyone who was there would recognize that in fact [the Rolling references] came out in the course of the testimony, but not from questioning by the prosecution. It came out in the course of questioning by the defense lawyer Frank De la Grana. Dr. Sidney Merin, who is a forensic psychologist of considerable expertise, testified in Danny Rolling's sentencing hearing and had personally interviewed, evaluated, and dealt with Danny Rolling face to face. He ascertained that in fact Danny Rolling used to get a big rise out of looking at these sort of things: disgusting pictures of mutilation, decapitation, sodomy — all sorts of deviant material such as that. He testified that this is where people such as Rolling get started out .. that came out on the witness stand, not as a result of prosecutorial questioning, but when the defense was questioning Merin. I made one other comment on the side during my closing statement that received one or two seconds of attention out of an hour-long closing argument," he told the *Journal*.

The artist Peter Kuper, who was flown to Florida from New York City to be an expert witness in the trial, said that Baggish's frequent invocation of Rolling in reference to Diana was uncalled for. Kuper has published Diana's work in his magazine *World War III Illustrated*. "It was shitty timing," Kuper told the *Journal*. "[Rolling's case] was really all in people's faces, so there was this pervasive fear of, 'My God, we've got to stop these people before they get started and here's our opportunity to do

In Defense of a Good Son

With respect to all characteristics that are good, I can only compare my son to "The Good Son" mentioned in the Bible. He has never done intentional harm to anyone, and has for 24 years been faithfully by my side. I understand him, his sensitivity and his fears. I know that he is sincere in what he believes about his art. When the true story about my son's character is exposed, you will love him as much as I. This conviction is a small price to pay for standing up for one's beliefs. It makes me proud to see that my shy little boy has grown into a talented young man who can make a difference in this mean, ugly world.

If you are really outraged by these gruesome drawings, then put your money where your mouth is, and make a donation to help fight these depicted horrors. Send a check to your local newspaper in care of the Fight Against Child Abuse or the Adam Walsh Foundation. Don't just sit there and wait for another dear little boy's head to be found floating in canal somewhere, cold and lifeless. Vent your anger with a much-needed donation, not by making my son a sacrificial lamb to appease your own ugliness.

Ministers and priests do criticize my son's work from the pulpit, but then take up a collection to help abused children.

Had it not been for overzealous prosecutors, my son's artistic endeavor may never have been noticed. Now there is a chance that it may have a positive impact on all our lives. God does work in mysterious ways.

— A Loving Father

Michael Diana, Sr. issued this statement to the press in defense of his son following Diana, Jr.'s conviction on three counts of obscenity

that, and they threw out all logic as well as law and the Constitution. That's really scary, because the ease with which that happened... granted, it was Pinellas County [Pinellas County is generally known to be an older, more conservative community], but the ability to play on people's fears was staggeringly easy.

"The fact is, the prosecutor was basically able to get away with saying that [Diana] is a serial killer in the making," Kuper continued. "'It's a four step process. Step one, you draw it...' and that whole thing. My response is: Step one, you write the horror story. Step two, you write the movie. Step three, you direct the movie. Step four, your name is Stephen King or Dean R. Koontz. It basically comes down that everyone of us is a serial killer in the making. What struck me as interesting was that this week in *Time* magazine there's an article about how people's fascination with serial killers in the United States is on the rise. I'm not happy with that fact, but it just makes Diana one more person interested in that area. There was distinctly an attitude on the jury's part saying,

Scene from Diana's newest book, Superfly, *"The Unholy Bible."*

'When I'm interested in serial killers [which one jurist was quoted as saying] and am fascinated by every gory detail, I'm doing it in a normal way. When this guy [Diana] over here is interested, it is in an abnormal way... ' Now they've made a separation from their interests and this 'sick' interest that he has. It was a classic example of attacking somebody for something that you share in common in a way that you can feel purified."

Kuper said that he came off of the stand quite satisfied with his testimony. "My initial impression was that I had had some impact on [the jury] and that the prosecutor had put his foot in his mouth on a number of points, asking me questions where my answer only made him look bad. I thought I had made a lot of headway explaining what was involved with Diana's medium by couching it in some art history, to point out that the theme of the work was not obscenity, but rather was dealing with victimization and that this was consistent throughout his work."

Kuper testified on the stand that some of Diana's work reminded him of Edvard Munch, the artist who painted the 1893 classic *The Scream*. Kuper also challenged the claim that art requires a noticeable acceptance from the world before it can considered as such. He said that art can be created in a vacuum, and that Vincent Van Gogh, who is the biggest selling fine artist in the world, was essentially unknown in his lifetime.

"I basically went along with the *Webster's Dictionary* definition, which is 'the human ability to create,'" Kuper told the *Journal*. "That doesn't make it great, a classic, or even something you'd want to hang on your wall. Diana's stuff isn't pretty; it's not something I'd want to look at every day on my wall, but it's not required to be that."

San Francisco publisher Seth Friedman of *Factsheet Five*, another expert witness, testified that *Boiled Angel* is part of a worldwide movement called the "'zine movement," which involves artists proliferating homemade magazines featuring very personal visions on any number of subjects. *Factsheet Five* is a 'zine review which has featured *Boiled Angel* in its "comics" category. According to Friedman, there are over 50,000 'zines being published worldwide with a readership in the millions, adding that Diana's is the first in the country to be tried on obscenity charges.

Baggish curtly challenged the authority of Friedman and Kuper following their testimonies, apparently to a successful end. He informed the jurors that the judgments from outsiders was irrelevant. "Pinellas County has its own identity," he said. "It doesn't have to accept what is acceptable in the bathhouses in San Francisco, and it doesn't have to accept what is acceptable in the crack alleys of New York."

"He actually managed to wipe mine and Seth Friedman's testimony away with that one line," said Kuper of Baggish's courtroom counter-attack. "It made us all homosexual drug users. In the United States — I've been conscious of this but it's upsetting to see it realized in this form — there is this general American feeling that if New York — 'Sin City' — and 'gay' San Francisco were to be chopped off the map and float away, it would be a good thing for this country. The idea that I somehow represent crack alleys in New York... hell, there's not even an alley on my street, let alone a crack alley. I had come off the stand feeling kind of giddy, thinking I had struck a blow for art and that [the jury] heard me. But the reality was no, [my testimony] translated to almost nothing."

The prosecution brought in a pair of experts from Eckerd College, art professor James Crane and literature professor Sterling Watson, who testified that *Boiled Angel* had absolutely no literary or artistic merit. Eckerd College is a religious institution, which Diana's lawyers took issue with.

"The whole thing was a circus," said Lirot. "They bring in experts from a religious university to judge the artistic merit of a piece of work that is highly critical of their very religion. That's a real unbiased witness there, right?"

Both professors said that although parts of *Boiled Angel* showed skill, it ultimately displayed no literary or artistic merit. Crane said that Diana's drawings were "exuberant, wild and kind of interesting in a macabre kind of way," but added that Diana had no sense of timing. "The emotional impact is like a jackhammer — bam! bam! bam!" he said, claiming that true art will build to a climax followed by a needed sense of release for the reader.

'Boiled Angel' case is troubling

Whether they truly believed the material in question fits the legal definition of obscenity or they allowed themselves to be misled by an overzealous prosecutor with a penchant for absurd comparisons, six jurors concluded last week the cartoons created by Michael Diana make the 24-year-old convenience store clerk a genuine criminal. Diana was convicted of publishing, distributing and advertising obscene material in a comic book called *Boiled Angel*.

There is nothing funny about the material in *Boiled Angel*. Diana's cartoons and stories portray rape, murder, drug use, dismemberment, satanic ritual and child abuse. The depictions are bizarre and disgusting. But legally obscene? That's a much harder case to make given the standards set by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The requirements for a judgment of obscenity are that a work have a dominant theme appealing to prurient interests, that it be patently offensive because it goes beyond contemporary community standards *and* that it be utterly without redeeming social value. In order to be declared legally obscene, material must meet all three tests. If it doesn't, no matter how disgusting, it is protected by the First Amendment. Diana argues his work mirrors society and its problems. If higher courts buy that argument, the obscenity judgment will not and should not stand.

There are other things troubling about this case. Assistant State Attorney Stuart Baggish told the jury: "This is how Danny Rolling (the confessed Gainesville serial killer) got started. Step one, you start with the drawings. Step two, you go on to the pictures. Step three is the movies. And step number four, you're into reality. You're creating these scenes in reality." That simply isn't true. There isn't a shred of evidence to link Rolling with material some might judge pornographic or obscene. Since when are prosecutors allowed to win convictions by fabricating stories to appeal to jurors' emotions?

And what possessed Pinellas Judge Walter Fullerton to order Diana to jail over the weekend? Diana's not a threat to society. He didn't try to flee during all the months leading up to his trial; there's no reason to expect him to flee now. He had a right to bail pending his sentencing Monday to three years' probation, 1,248 hours of community service, a psychiatric evaluation and a journalism ethics course.

This is a trial that shouldn't have happened in the first place. It created an audience *Boiled Angel* might not have had but for the publicity. The best thing to do with warped imaginations is to ignore them. In a vacuum of inattention, they usually dry up and blow away.

St. Petersburg Times *editorial from 3/29/94. Reprinted with permission*

Watson said that although the writing showed some literary skill, it was not art because it didn't provide readers with an affirmation of life. This claim was later rebuked by Kuper, who said that the entire German Expressionism movement would be invalidated under such a rubric and that the distinction is undefinable in terms of abstract art.

Two mental health experts were also brought in. Psychologist Sidney Merin testified that Diana's material would appeal primarily to deviant groups such as murderers and child molesters.

Several key figures in the defense criticized the testimony of Merin, whom defense attorney Frank De la Grana called a "hired whore." Merin was paid in excess of $2,500 to testify as an expert witness for the prosecution, and Diana's lawyers say that he is a "professional witness" who has testified in a large number of cases for money. "There's nothing you can do about it," said De la Grana, "except to try and damage the witness's credibility by proving he's biased because he's being paid to give this testimony.

"But the reason he gets paid to do this," continued De la Grana, "is because he's good at it. He's the kind of witness that's very hard to cross-examine because you ask him what time it is and he'll tell you, 'Well, in London it's such and such a time, and in Spain it's such and such a time.' He won't give you a straight answer. We went through [*Boiled Angel*] page by page with him and asked him what was sexual about panels that were not even remotely sexual and he would say, 'Well, to a deviant that could be sexual,' and so on."

"One thing that really disturbed me was that although I was brought out here at the defense's expense, I received no money to appear on the stand, but the prosecution's expert witness received $2,500 to appear," said Kuper. "[Merin's] a complete hired gun, which I would think should disqualify him as a witness. If it's a job, then you're not going to make your employer look bad or you'll lose your job. I didn't agree with everything that the defense said, and I said so, because I wanted the jury to know that I wasn't a patsy, that my testimony was based on my own experience and information."

"Obscenity law is the only type of criminal offense that's an after-the-fact determination," Lirot told the *Journal*. "That's just totally repugnant to our system of criminal law; you're supposed to be on notice as to what you can and cannot do. The criteria are still too vague."

Psychiatrist Arturo Gonzales argued for the defense that not even deviant groups would be interested as Merin suggested. He said that the S.L.A.P.S. criteria were not fulfilled by Diana's work. "It's so gross, so vile, so repugnant, it's not going to appeal to the prurient interest in anybody," he testified.

HYSTERIA

WOMEN, HUMOR and SOCIAL CHANGE

At last a magazine for thinking women. Fine writing and zinging cartoons explore the dimensions of the whole woman and the complex challenges she faces in our society, whether a radical, careerist mother of three, or all of the above.

Feisty, feminist and funny, *Hysteria* will get you laughing and leave you thinking.

• • ■ • •

"Irreverent, insightful, brash and sometimes bawdy"
- New York Newsday

"Hysteria is meant for anyone with a sense of humor, feminist or not."
- New York Perspectives

"Naysayers who quip that feminist humor is an oxymoron should check out such articles as "Getting in Touch with Your Inner Bitch."
- USA Today

• • ■ • •

SIGN ME UP! I wanna laugh.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

_____

PHONE _____

◇ I want a one-year subscription (4 issues).
Enclosed is my check or money order for $18.00
Canada=US $24. / Int'l=US $33.

◇ I'll just try a sample.
Enclosed is my check or money order for $4.95
Canada=US $6.95 / Int'l=US $8.95

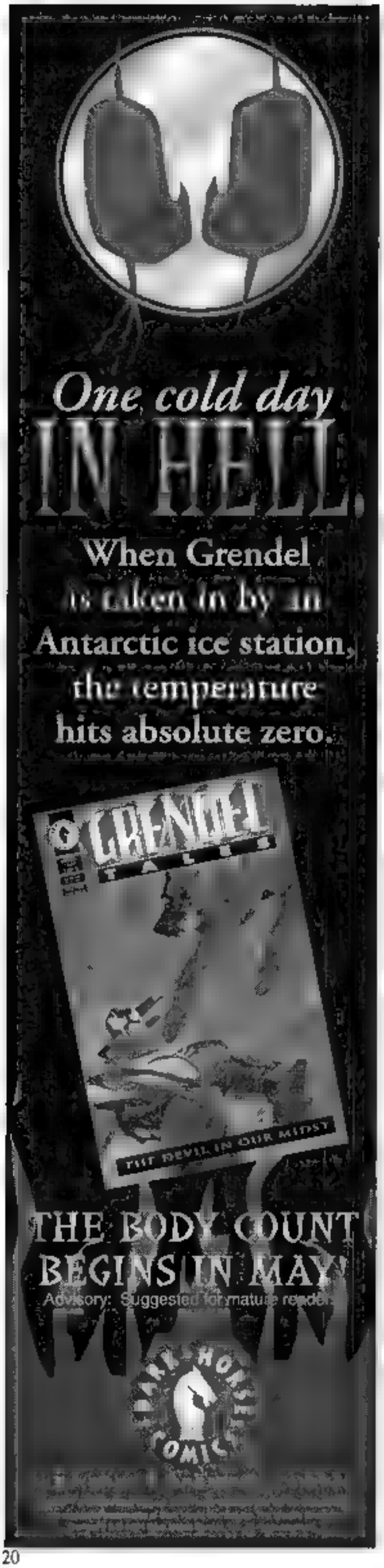
◇ This is a gift subscription from:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

_____

Hysteria Box 8581 - Brewster Station Bridgeport, CT 06605



"The predominant theme [of Diana's work] is sexual sadism. It is about dismemberment . It is about very violent, despicable, horrifying acts," said Baggish in his closing argument attempting to prove the obscenity of Diana's work

Lead defense lawyer Luke Lirot said in his closing statements that Diana's pictures are about the truth. "They're shocking, they're disgusting, they're horrifying, but they're the truth... It's hard, but the truth hurts. Mike Diana is blunt and brave and uninhibited in the way he brings us the truth. That's reality that he's showing us."

CLOSING ARGUMENTS

"I'm just disappointed that the jury didn't understand the art enough to find me not guilty," Diana told the *Journal*. "It was a hassle going to jail for four days... I thought we were doing pretty good, but the prosecutors basically came out and lied to the jury, saying that I was a danger to society. They told the jury that everything I said was a bunch of lies. They scared the jury, and the art was too powerful for them to understand."

"Ouch," Lirot said of the verdict. "You know, the thing that really hurts... we won that case. We tried the hell out of that case and blew those guys away." When asked why he thought they lost the case then, Lirot responded, "Can I be very candid? A very ignorant and paranoid jury, giving in to the innuendo that the people looking at the material in question are going to go out and commit serial murder, totally incapable of exercising any degree of artistic discipline to get beyond the initial 'what it is' and into the 'why it is.' I've tried a lot of cases and this is the first time I've ever been so disappointed and felt so cheated by a jury... it brought tears to my eyes, I was so disappointed."

"The feature of the trial was the material," said Baggish. "Michael Diana made the absurd assertion that he produced *Boiled Angel* because he was motivated out of a need to be a victims' advocate. I focused on how ridiculous it was for him to claim to be a victims' advocate when in fact he publishes very technical lists on how to be a successful serial killer. Very technical stuff, like how to keep from leaving trace evidence to keep from getting linked to a crime. I think the big issue here — which the media has largely missed — is that Diana has completely mixed up who is the perpetrator and who is the victim."

"We had a judge who never liked this case from the beginning," said De la Grana. "This was the type of case where [the prosecution] can make an emotional argument and people will throw everything aside and make an emotional decision. The jury didn't understand what the true issues were, as the editorial in the *St. Petersburg Times* pointed out." [*see sidebar, page 19*]

"We couldn't have put on a better case. It was the jury: conservative, all Christian, a retired community. Unfortunately, under no circumstances, under the wildest imaginations, could this have been considered a jury of Diana's peers. We even established that no one in Pinellas County ever even saw the comic outside of the undercover cop who ordered it."

"I think that the judge was not very good

More Diana from Superfly

with the intricate areas of law, and obscenity law is among the most intricate of all," said Chuck Shepherd, a former trial lawyer who covered the case as a freelance writer for *Playboy*. "He just lost control of the two major legal issues on which *Boiled Angel* has an excellent chance of prevailing. He just lost control, he allowed the issues to be mingled. One was the issue of appealing to prurient interest, the other was the issue of serious artistic and literary value: when you allow sloppiness, when you allow those two issues to depart from the very sharp judicial guidelines, then the jury is left free to, in essence, impose what they like and dislike and what they're scared about and not scared about. It's so important that those lines be maintained as the Supreme Court drew them, but they weren't in this case."

"I think a lot of [the guilty verdict] had to do with the fact that it was attacking Christianity," said Kuper. "They just won't tolerate that

in Florida. Jury selection had something to do with it, there's no question that this was not a jury of his peers. Each jurist was at least ten years older than him and they all knew squat about art and thought that comics were simply for kids. This was all a big mystery to them. They couldn't look at him as being anything

other than an oddity. Everything was stacked against him; it was definitely a case of being guilty until proven innocent. This case was reminiscent of the '50s when they went after [EC Comics Publisher] William Gaines, saying that our kids are being turned into demons by horror comics. This was a scarily fascinating experience, seeing the process of how people view and think about art."

"If you go through the court records you'll find that the prosecuting attorney was declaring *Boiled Angel* blasphemous as proof of its obscenity," said Seth Friedman. "But if you say that it's blasphemous, then it automatically becomes a form of social criticism, critiquing religion as a whole. That does not make it obscene; in fact, calling it blasphemous pulls it away from the definition of obscene. By saying that it's obscene because it's blasphemous, [Baggish] is just making up the laws as he goes along."

"Obviously, I'm appalled that Diana was convicted," said Comic Book Legal Defense Fund President Denis Kitchen. The CBLDF had spent over $5,000 to help defend Diana, and are expected to contribute more. "The Legal Defense Fund is going to look forward to an appeal so we can overturn this. I understand that Peter [Koper] did an exemplary job, but the bad news is that the jury didn't listen. I think, given the county, which is extremely conservative, the jurists obviously were appalled by the material and did not really listen to First Amendment arguments. I was happy to see that the *St. Petersburg Times* editorialized against the decision, pointing out how the judge and jury really goofed."

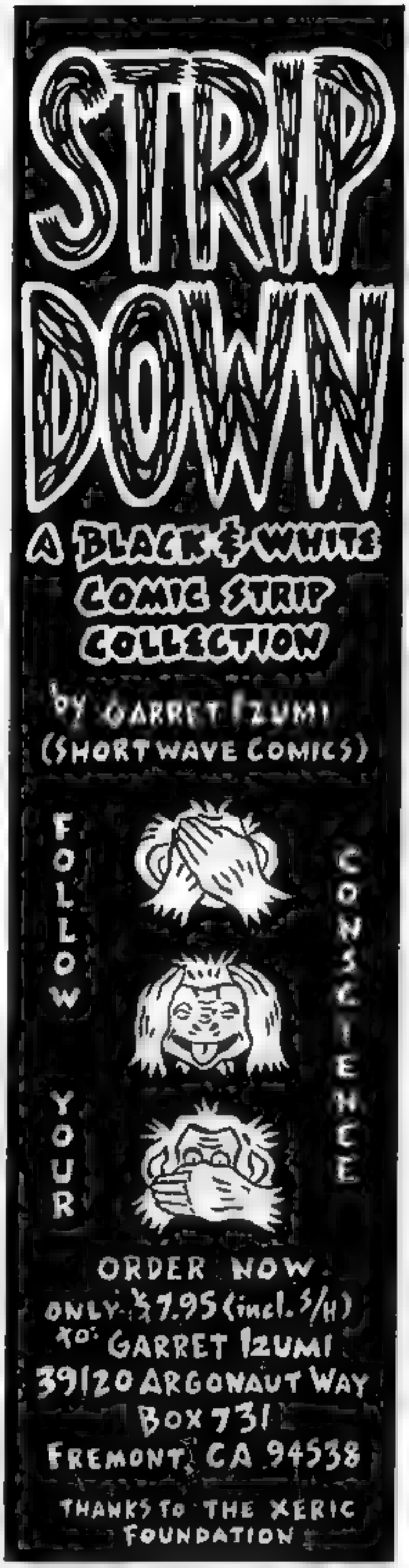
"It's total bull," said Diana's fiancee Suzi Monroe Smith of the verdict. Smith and Diana met through their mutual problems with local obscenity laws. She hosted a cable TV show in Tampa, Fla. until March of 1993, when she was suspended for broadcasting a tape of the late performance artist G.G. Allin defecating on stage. She was threatened with legal action by the state attorney's office before they announced that the local obscenity laws did not cover defecation. When she heard about Diana's case, she offered support, and the two have been seeing each other since.

"At least they didn't give him jail time," Smith added. "He can still be with me and we can get married, but they shouldn't prosecute a man because he draws. He didn't commit any crime."

Diana's lawyers are already planning an appeal, which must be filed 30 days from the date of sentencing. "We do feel confident on an appeal," said Lirot. "This whole issue needs to be revisited."

"I think they have an excellent chance on appeal," said Shepherd. "This is a technical legal issue, but it's precisely the technical legal issue that 2 Live Crew prevailed on [the rap music group 2 Live Crew won an appeal after being convicted in Florida State court on similar obscenity charges], and that is that nowhere in the government's testimony — nowhere, nowhere at all — is there evidence that the dominant theme of *Boiled Angel*, when taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interests of the average person. The 2 Live Crew verdict was reversed unanimously in the court of appeals, very abruptly, because they realized that it was too easy for the jury to impose their own opinions on that issue."

When asked what the future now holds for him, Diana told the *Journal*, "I guess it all depends upon the appeal. I don't even understand what kind of art I can safely do. They told me I can't draw anything that might be deemed obscene — even for my own use — but I'm not sure what that means. They told me today that I can't have anything obscene at all, so I don't know if that means I can't have art around from other people, or if I'm going to have to get rid of a lot of my stuff. If they don't approve of it, they might term it obscene whether it is or not." **ER**



Berger Subject of CBLDF Internal Investigation

[continued from page 15]

completed, he's still a member of the board," said Kitchen. When asked if Berger would be asked to resign if the allegations were proven true, he replied, "I am reviewing the bylaws for procedural guidelines. I've not had a member of the board come under fire before. If the allegations amount to something akin to a misdemeanor charge, I would be tempted to say screw *The Comics Journal* and their investigation and that we're behind [Berger] 100 percent. But, if we see a pattern [of negligence], then he's going to be facing a stern board."

The evidence against Berger strongly suggests negligence. Berger allegedly went as many as three to four months on two separate occasions without contacting the lawyers for Michael Diana, who lost his obscenity trial against the State of Florida in March [*see "Michael Diana Convicted and Sentenced on Obscenity Charges," page 15*] Lawyers Luke Lirot and Frank De la Grana had believed that the CBLDF had withdrawn support until newly-hired Executive Director Susan Alston contacted them on Feb. 22, just weeks before the trial, to routinely check on the status of the case. The CBLDF and Diana's lawyers re-established contact at that point and the Fund has been supporting Diana's cause since. Berger reportedly had similar problems with the lawyers for Timothy Parks and Gordon Lee, two other CBLDF-backed cases, and two reporters have mentioned difficulty getting in touch with Berger for stories they were working on.

Berger denies all allegations made about any negligence on his part. "That's just not the case. I always return my phone calls," said Berger. "If I thought that I had jeopardized Diana's case in any way, I would resign from the board and go down and offer to do [Diana's] community service work."

"The Fund dropped the ball in [Diana's] case," said Seth Friedman, publisher of the fanzine encyclopedia *Factsheet Five* and expert witness in the Diana trial. "I don't know what the Fund has done that has been successful, but this certainly wouldn't classify. I think it's entirely possible that the blame could be placed on them." Friedman's comments referred primarily to the break in communication that apparently resulted from Berger's end.

First Amendment lawyer Burton Joseph is a large reason the CBLDF believes its troubles are in the past

Chuck Shepherd, who covered the trial for *Playboy* and the Tampa Bay area paper *Creative Loafing*, said, "If [Berger] had handled it better it certainly might have made a difference." Shepherd, a former trial lawyer, went on to explain, "[Diana's lawyers] certainly would have been more expansive in their idea of the case if they had known that more of the bills would have been paid. But what they thought was, the more they shelled out of pocket, the more they would get stuck with."

"As a lawyer, I can tell you that you set a parameter based on what's possible," said Shepherd. "You figure out what the best defense is that you can put on within those parameters. [Diana's lawyers] were working on a parameter within what they were willing to put in out of pocket, with the likelihood that they were never going to get it back. That's a smaller amount of money than if they had set a parameter with the guarantee they would get it all back."

Lirot referred to Berger's involvement in the Diana case as "a justifiable scandal."

CBLDF First Vice-President Greg Ketter told the *Journal*, "Most of the criticism is deserved — the Fund has made mistakes. Unfortunately, it's Michael Diana's livelihood on the line. He's the one affected by all of this the most. The Fund will live and die on its own, but if anyone at the Fund has done something to affect him adversely, I would be extremely disappointed."

BERGER & THE DIANA PRE-TRIAL

The CBLDF agreed to finance the case of Michael Christopher Diana in April of 1993 when Diana was charged with three counts of publishing and advertising lewd and/or obscene material. According to Kitchen at the time, Diana contacted Mitch Berger and the board agreed to finance the case, having decided that the First Amendment was the dominant issue under litigation. Arising from this initial contact between Diana and Berger, Berger became Diana's only contact to the

Fund. It is evident from existing correspondence that Berger's was the only name and phone number that Diana's lawyers knew at the Fund, and that they relied solely on him for communication, believing him to be wholly representative of the Fund.

The CBLDF retained local counsel on behalf of Diana in the form of Luke Lirot and Frank De la Grana, who then assumed responsibility for Diana in regards to keeping in contact with the Fund. Lirot and De la Grana, who had little or no prior knowledge of the comic book industry, knew only Berger as a contact at the Fund. Another lawyer, Scott Boardman, was brought in shortly before the trial to help with the case, and he apparently was less familiar with the CBLDF than Lirot and De la Grana. When the *Journal* first spoke with Berger after the trial, he had never heard of Boardman and was unaware that another lawyer had even been brought in.

The CBLDF gave Diana's defense $5,000 in July of last year, following which apparently began the first breakdown in communication. Lirot and De la Grana maintain that Berger just stopped returning phone calls and letters at that point. "The $5,000 disintegrated in a week or two, and we were left like wandering sheep." Lirot said that they were writing and calling Berger at his home residence, adding that they had no CBLDF letterhead or anything else in writing that had any other numbers than Berger's.

"We were given a contact person [Berger] and didn't get much response from him," said Luke Lirot. "I don't want to criticize him because I have no explanation why [he didn't respond], but we pretty much had to dig everything up by ourselves. So I mean, we put ourselves out."

Berger, and therefore the Fund, reportedly had no more contact with Diana's lawyers from this time in late summer until the very end of the year. On Dec. 1, 1993, the Florida *St. Petersburg Times* reported that Lirot and De la Grana had told the judge in the case that Diana had apparently lost the promised financial support of the CBLDF. De la Grana said that the Fund had stopped returning phone calls and that he and Lirot were representing Diana for free. The lawyers asked the court to declare Diana, who was making $150 a week as a clerk in his father's convenience store, an indigent. The judge refused.

The Comics Journal ran an update on Diana's case in January 1994 and interviewed Diana's lawyers and Berger regarding the *St. Petersburg Times* article. Lirot clarified that the *Times* report was misleading, implying that the motion for indigence was a *result* of the Fund pulling support, when in actuality Lirot was using communication problems with the Fund as leverage to get additional state support.

"I am and was very hesitant to criticize the Fund because they haven't paid us," Lirot said in April. "I'm afraid they're going to say, 'Well, if you're just going to put us down, forget it.'"

When the *Journal* spoke to Berger in December, he said he had "recently" spoken with Lirot and was trying to secure an expert witness for the trial. As it turned out, expert witnesses were secured only hours before the court's deadline, a fact which has drawn harsh criticism from Friedman, Shepherd, and others. When asked if Berger did anything to help secure expert witnesses, Lirot paused and said, "No... He said he would, but we never got one name out of him."

Berger blames Diana's lawyers for dropping out of contact with the Fund last fall. He said that after the *Journal* brought the December *St. Petersburg Times* article to his attention, he called Lirot. "I got on the phone and said, 'Hey, send us a bill.' I believe they did and I believe they received more money."

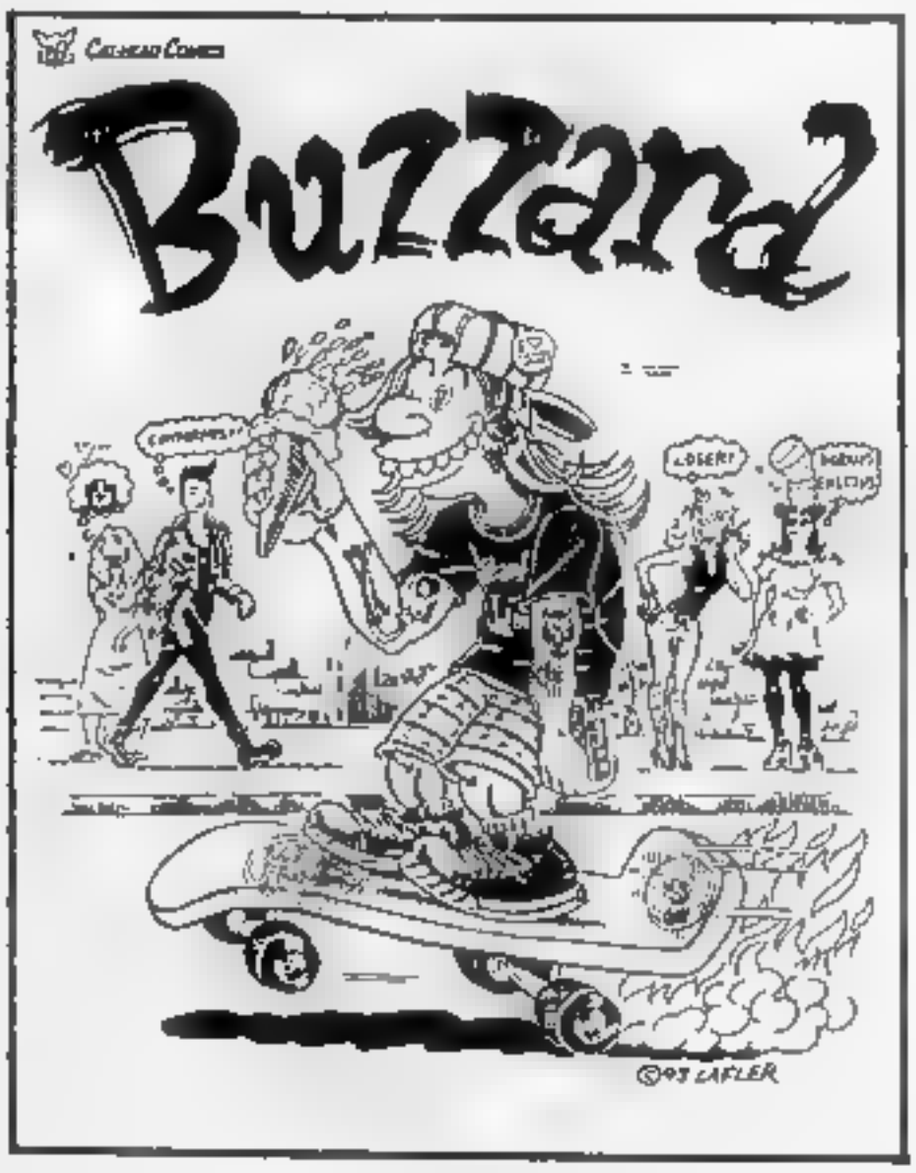
In a statement written later [see below], Berger contradicted himself, asserting that "Diana's lawyers have not yet submitted an itemized bill for their legal work to the Fund."

Lirot says that Berger did call him shortly after the newspaper report and requested a bill, which Lirot claims was sent but never paid. "We never received another dime... We went out of pocket a lot on this," Lirot told the *Journal*.

Admitting that his "bill" wasn't itemized,

CAT-HEAD COMICS *Wants You!*

...To buy our whole line of comics, that is. It shouldn't be too hard, since there's only two titles. Make that two GREAT titles, but you can be the judge of that (for a few bucks).



BUZZARD Comics anthology edited by Stephen Beaupre, features lotsa top ink-slingers such as Doug Alien, J.R. Williams, Roy Tompkins, Julie Doucet, Jeff Johnson, Mario Hernandez, R.L. Crabb & others.

BUGHOUSE the new solo title by Steve Lafler featuring Jimmy Watts the be-bop saxophone bug, and whatever else comes flying off Laflers' brush!

$3.75 PPD. each from
CAT-HEAD COMICS
P.O. Box 576
Hudson, MA 01749

RETAILERS! Fast Cat-Head re-orders call (510)451-8242

Lirot explained, "when I talked to Mitch, it was my understanding that that's all we had to do.... Nobody told us that was unacceptable. I would have gladly sent an itemized bill."

Lirot's letter to Berger, dated January 16, requested an additional $10,000. According to Alston, Berger never forwarded the letter to Kitchen, who handles bill-paying as treasurer of the Fund. Alston finally received a copy of the letter and several others from Diana's lawyers in February.

"The attorneys sent copies [of their correspondence with Berger] to demonstrate that they had tried in vain to get a response," Kitchen told the *Journal*. "It's apparent from their letters that the Florida attorneys only had [Berger] as a contact. Several letters were sent to him, which I never saw, obviously because they were complaints that [the lawyers] weren't getting any attention."

Alston told the *Journal* that the letter stated in part, "Our original retainer of $5,000 has long since been utilized. Both Mr. De la Grana and I have been working diligently on this case and we would deeply appreciate additional money from your organization. Please remit at least $10,000 so we do not feel we have lost money for our efforts in this action."

"At that point money was not really the object," Lirot said. He likened his letters to a cry for help, seeking assistance from the industry-knowledgeable Fund in securing expert witnesses.

When asked to comment on the lawyers' complaints, Berger said, "Let me say this. whenever you have a case that doesn't work out, there are always people who are willing and eager to point a finger of blame, you know? I haven't lost that many cases, but when I do I'm not happy. You blame everybody but yourself.... I'm sure upon further reflection they would not hold to that statement.... Mike Diana got representation a zillion times better than if he hadn't been supported by the Fund."

But Lirot and De la Grana maintain that they felt the Fund had withdrawn its support. Alston told the *Journal* that when she called Diana's lawyers in February, they "were shocked to hear from me, they thought we had fallen off the face of the earth or ran out of money."

Shepherd also said he's had difficulty getting Berger to return phone calls. "I finally called his Washington residence on Aug. 26 [1993], right before my deadline," Shepherd said. Shepherd previously had inadvertently been calling another lawyer named Mitch Berger in Washington, D.C. until Shepherd realized the mistake. The CBLDF's Berger told the *Journal* that the two Bergers often get each other's messages. When Shepherd did finally call the proper Berger, "I tried to explain to his message machine in several sentences why I was calling, but I got no response," he said. "I implored him to call me back."

Another reporter, Michael Catron, who wrote about the CBLDF for *The Comics Journal* last year, said that his phone records verify he called Berger 11 times for a story before getting a response.

Although he couldn't recall ever getting any messages from Shepherd, Berger insists that he returned Catron's calls. "I called [Catron] back once or twice and he wasn't able to take my call," Berger said.

When Alston was asked if she ever had problems getting in touch with Berger, she paused and said, "Yes, I have had difficulty in reaching him."

Berger vehemently denies accusations that he has been responsible for any breaks in communication. "Did I get phone calls that I tried to return but never got a hold of the person? Yes, that happens. But, I do this on a volunteer basis.... I work as a lawyer for the government, and I can try to return a call two or three times. If I don't get a hold of them I'm going to expect them to try and get me back as well. In terms of any requests for money, it's been handled expeditiously. No one has waited on a check."

Kitchen acknowledged that the number of allegations weighed heavily against Berger. "If there were one or two people [making allegations], I would say, 'Well, it's his word against their's. But, we've got several people here," he said.

THE PHONY PRESS RELEASE

Despite comments from Kitchen and Alston that support many of the allegations being made, an unsigned statement was faxed to the *Journal* on April 25 from the CBLDF that praises Berger's work for the CBLDF and avoids all mention of the criticisms against him: "Among those contributing untold hours of volunteer labor [to the Fund] is one of the Fund's board of directors, Mitch Berger," the opening paragraph of the statement reads. The unsigned release [*see sidebar, this page*] includes several statements which appear to contradict previous statements made to the *Journal* by people within the Fund.

Originally thought by the *Journal* to be an official CBLDF statement, Alston soon called the *Journal* and said that the statement, which

---

Despite the change in our national leadership, over the last year, the fight against local censorship has heated up. During that time the fund has spent or has committed to spend $50,000 to educate the public, through litigation, that comics are literature, that comics are art. However, until this last year the fund has been little more than one case away from being depleted. Fortunately, because of the generosity, and the increased awareness of comic art fans and professionals, the fund has obtained financial resources to hire the labor that had previously been donated. Among those contributing untold hours of volunteer labor is one of the fund's board of directors, Mitch Berger.

Over the years he has been with the Defense Fund, Mitch Berger, a lawyer, has monitored the cases being litigated through the fund. This monitoring has entailed hundreds of hours of free legal work, travel, and speaking for the fund with the press. This summer, when the Board met, Tom Powers who had provided invaluable staff support to the Fund announced that he was returning to Fantagraphics and would no longer have the time to work for the Fund. Mitch brought to the Board's attention that without Tom's assistance, the number of cases the Fund was involved with were too numerous and complicated for him to be able to continue monitoring all of them. At that point Mitch suggested that the Fund engage the services of Burton Joseph, one of the nation's premiere first amendment attorneys, to monitor the cases the fund was supporting. Subject to cost, the Board approved the suggestion. In January 1994 the Fund entered into an agreement with Mr. Joseph.

During a transition period that followed, during which Mitch was still monitoring cases, the trial preparations for Mike Diana's case were underway. It was made clear to Mr. Diana's lawyers that the CBLDF was fully behind Mr. Diana. His

lawyers were specifically authorized to obtain expert witnesses they thought were necessary for the case. His lawyers were also directed to provide the Fund with a bill for work done, so that additional payments could be authorized. As of the writing of this statement, Diana's lawyers have not submitted an itemized bill for their legal work to the fund.

With all that said, the fund is confident that Mike Diana was well represented in his trial. Often representation in such a trial, where the judge is in effect a second prosecutor,' entails making a careful record for appellate review. Because the fund authorized expenses so that every legal issue that could be raised on appeal, was raised at trial, the fund' is also confident that Mike Diana's conviction will ultimately be overturned on appeal. This is often the case in obscenity convictions where appellate judges, insulated from political pressure, are more likely to uphold the Constitution than local trial judges, who are often little more than politicians in black robes. Finally, it should be remembered that the Fund did not prevail at trial in the Friendly Frank's case,' but did win on appeal. The Fund expects a similar result for Mike Diana.

As to the questions of contacts with the press, this was also an issue raised during last summer's Board meeting As a result this January, the Fund engaged the services of an executive Director, Susan Alston, who will serve as the primary press contact.' The fund has also obtained an 800 number (800 992-2533) to improve communications with anyone needing assistance or information.

The CBLDF sent The Comics Journal *this unsigned statement in defense of Berger Executive Director Susan Alston and President Denis Kitchen later disavowed the release explaining that Berger had written it himself without approval from anyone else at the CBLDF*

was not on CBLDF letterhead, was written by Berger himself despite the third person voice used to discuss Berger's contributions, and that it was not approved by anyone at the Fund.

"It was absolutely not official," Kitchen later told the *Journal*. "He typed this thing which purported to be a statement from the board... extolling his own virtues. I had originally asked him to prepare a personal statement for two purposes: one, to carefully track [Berger's] actions and to justify them to *The Comics Journal*, and two, it's a document I needed him to write for internal purposes, so that if he tells me 'Here's what I did and why,' I can assess whether his actions were proper or if it was a matter of serious negligence."

Kitchen continued: "I told him that as the official spokesperson for the organization, I could be the only one to write a formal response from the Fund, or maybe Susan. Why would I ask the person who was in trouble to write that formal response? I have to write it, it has to go out on our letterhead, and it has to be official. What he wrote couldn't conceivably be under any circumstances our official position. It makes no sense. It would have been completely addle-brained for me to ask him to write what he wrote. It would have been the dumbest thing that could ever be done, and I assure you I didn't do it. In giving him the benefit of the doubt, maybe he misunderstood me, I don't know."

Berger admitted that he did write the statement, but maintains that "I was asked to write it in the third person." Kitchen says this is "absolutely not true."

"I was asked to write a statement. I wrote one," said Berger. When asked if he was aware that the Fund did not approve it and accepts no responsibility for it, he replied, "The word 'approve' can have a dozen different meanings. The fact is, I certainly stand by everything in there as being absolutely 100 percent true."

Kitchen was less committal as to the truth of the statement. He said, "I told Mitch [after I had read the statement], 'Look, you are a volunteer — we have not been paying you. The organization is composed of volunteers who have full-time jobs, and we all know that, so no one's trying to crucify you. But serious charges have been made that you have neglected to do certain things. Specifically, there was correspondence with Lirot and other attorneys that was never responded to. Mike Catron, Chuck Shepherd — a number of people are arguing that you did not return calls, etc., and I don't know if you have a legitimate defense or not, but I need to know because I have a potential public relations problem with the Fund and it could be a serious one. I need *you* to respond to it. *You*!'"

Kitchen added that the situation surrounding the statement has caused him to "think that there's a higher degree of self-interest [in Berger] than I originally perceived. I think this is a legitimate journalistic inquiry, and I find that sad."

The statement Berger wrote is filled with arguable points, despite Berger's claim to its 100 percent accuracy. "It was made clear to Mr. Diana's lawyers that the CBLDF was fully behind Diana," the release states, despite admissions from both Kitchen and Alston that correspondence obtained from Diana's lawyers clearly showed that Berger had not effectively kept in communication with them.

"[Diana's] lawyers were specifically authorized to obtain expert witnesses they thought were necessary for the case," the statement continues. Diana's lawyers, however, have never claimed that they didn't have authority Provided the Fund was behind their cause, expert witness "authorization" was a non-issue. What was an issue, rather, was a need for guidance and direction in who to approach as witnesses and how to secure them Lirot told the *Journal*, "We [needed] help and guidance. what kind of experts have [they] got that we can use?" Lirot needed the CBLDF to tell him who "they [the Fund] thought were necessary," because the lawyers' unfamiliarity with the comics industry prevented them from doing it themselves.

CBLDF First Vice-President Greg Ketter told the *Journal*, in response to Berger's point regarding expert witnesses, "That's not the point. [The lawyers] don't know anybody [in the comics industry]. We should be doing what he asked them to do."

"[Diana's] lawyers were also directed to provide the Fund with a bill for work done, so that additional payments could be authorized. As of the writing of this statement, Diana's lawyers have not submitted an itemized bill for their legal work to the Fund," the statement continues. This statement was sent to the *Journal* on April 25, yet Alston told the *Journal* that same day that she had in fact received an itemized bill from Lirot on April 20 for $26,562.80. She also said, "I showed [Berger] the bill before he wrote that."

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

While it appears that perceived communication breakdowns from the lawyers' viewpoint stemmed from Berger, it is unclear how Berger could shirk his responsibilities for so long without attracting the attention of the rest of the Fund. Kitchen and Alston maintain that they had no knowledge of any alleged negligence on Berger's part until Alston's phone call to Diana's lawyers on Feb. 22, approximately six or seven months after communication prob-

lems began.

"It was my experience that there is no communication within the Fund," said Chuck Shepherd.

Greg Ketter told the *Journal* that he debated quitting the Fund around the beginning of this year because "things had been moving so slowly [on the Diana case] — as all of this clearly illustrates." Ketter, who's been with the Fund from the beginning, now believes things have stabilized and that the hiring of Alston and Joseph will result in a optimally effective CBLDF. Ketter also admitted that he, too, has had difficulty getting in contact with Berger on occasion.

The CBLDF as it was structured during most of 1993 and early 1994 was composed of four board members who worked voluntarily for the Fund, and Susan Alston, who is the only full-time paid employee of the nonprofit organization. The four board members are President/Treasurer Denis Kitchen, First Vice President Greg Ketter, Second Vice President Mitch Berger, and Secretary Frank Mangiaracina. Frank Miller joined the board early this year, but apparently came on too late to have any involvement in the Diana trial or the events that preceded it. First Amendment specialist Burton Joseph was retained as official legal counsel for the Fund on Feb. 1, but he also came to the CBLDF too late to have had any involvement in CBLDF cases up to this point.

The CBLDF has one regularly scheduled board meeting every August at the San Diego ComicCon, with other board meeting conference calls scheduled as necessary (usually on a quarterly basis). Beyond that, Alston, as well as Fund Administrator Thom Powers before her, effectively served as a liaison within the Fund, communicating with board members on a situation by situation basis. Powers' position was a part time administrative position which he held until August. The part-time position has since evolved into Alston's current position as a result of the Fund's heavier workload as well as having the financial resources for the position to be cost-effective.

"The way it worked up until December or January was that I was the liaison between the lawyers on the case and the board [of directors]," said Berger. "But frankly, it just got to be too much. We had a number of cases going we had other things that we were doing internally. Frankly, it was ten to 15 hours a week of work. And it was getting more as we were getting to trial. So that's why the board decided to employ the law firm of Barsy, Joseph & Lichtenstein. They're now the liaison between the lawyers handling the cases and the board.

"People have done, as you can imagine, hours and hours of work for nothing... but you know, the procedures had to change because it just couldn't be done on a voluntary basis, and when we had the money to [hire Alston and Joseph], it made sense to do it," he said.

Alston's position acts as a liaison between the board members, who have little CBLDF-related contact with each other outside of board meetings. All board members have full-time jobs — Kitchen owns Kitchen Sink Press, Berger is the supervisory general attorney for Washington, D.C.'s consumer litigation branch, Mangiaracina owns Friendly Frank Distribution, Ketter owns Dreamhaven Books, and Miller is a popular comics creator — so although at times they might spend 10-15 hours per week on CBLDF-related activity, more often than not they spend very little if any. Ex-Fund Administrator Thom Powers describes the board member position as "largely titular, although it can vary, particularly if it's the week of a trial." Kitchen agreed with this assessment.

Fund president Denis Kitchen has opened an investigation to determine the severity of Berger's alleged negligence.

It appears that before Alston's arrival, with the position previously being only part-time and having little to do with direct case involvement, communication within the Fund was minimal. Berger's apparent negligence was able to go on for so long because nothing appeared wrong from the Fund's end. As Alston put it, "[The lines of communication] only went in one direction and stopped." Ironically, all of the complaints Diana's lawyers made were sent to Berger. Kitchen said it was obvious that Berger didn't share the correspondence because the correspondence was critical of Berger.

"Yes, there was a weak link in the organization, and we didn't know about it. I sat in the board meeting last August and heard all of the reports go around," Alston said of the individual board member reports, in which members go over the status of their respective case(s). "Everybody appeared to be on top of all of their cases, so there was no reason to question anything," she added.

"From my point of view," said Kitchen, "what annoys me the most is not that he didn't have time; I understand that, we're all busy. But if he couldn't deal with this, why didn't he forward [the work] to me or Greg Ketter? Ketter specifically had asked to oversee the Diana case at one point."

"We have recognized the problem, and we have plugged it up," Alston said of the communication breakdown at Berger's end. "I hope, by me coming on full-time and taking over all correspondence with all of the lawyers defending our cases, and by hiring Burton Joseph, who will be our legal counsel to all of the lawyers handling our cases."

Since Alston and Joseph have been in contract with Lirot, he said he feels much more confident about the Fund's support. "I don't want to be critical of Mr. Berger, but unfortunately it just didn't seem to work out. Alston seemed to be much closer to the hub... and Burt Joseph is one of my heroes.... We don't forsee any more problems.

[redacted]

The process by which Diana's lawyers secured expert witnesses for the trial appears to be one of the key results of the communication breakdown at Berger's end. Although the two who testified — the artist Peter Kuper and *Factsheet Five* Publisher Seth Friedman — did an excellent job according to the lawyers and other sources, they were secured only at the last moment and after several others were ruled out, refused, or were unable to be tracked down due to the short notice. "We were very, very fortunate to get Peter Kuper and Seth Friedman under the circumstances," said Lirot.

When asked for the circumstances regarding expert witness selection, Lirot said that he and De la Grana were basically on their own until late February, despite Berger's assurances in December that he was helping with the selection process. Because of the lawyers' unfamiliarity with the comic book industry, they searched locally for people who could testify as

DID YOU ENJOY THAT STORY? IT'S JUST ONE STORY

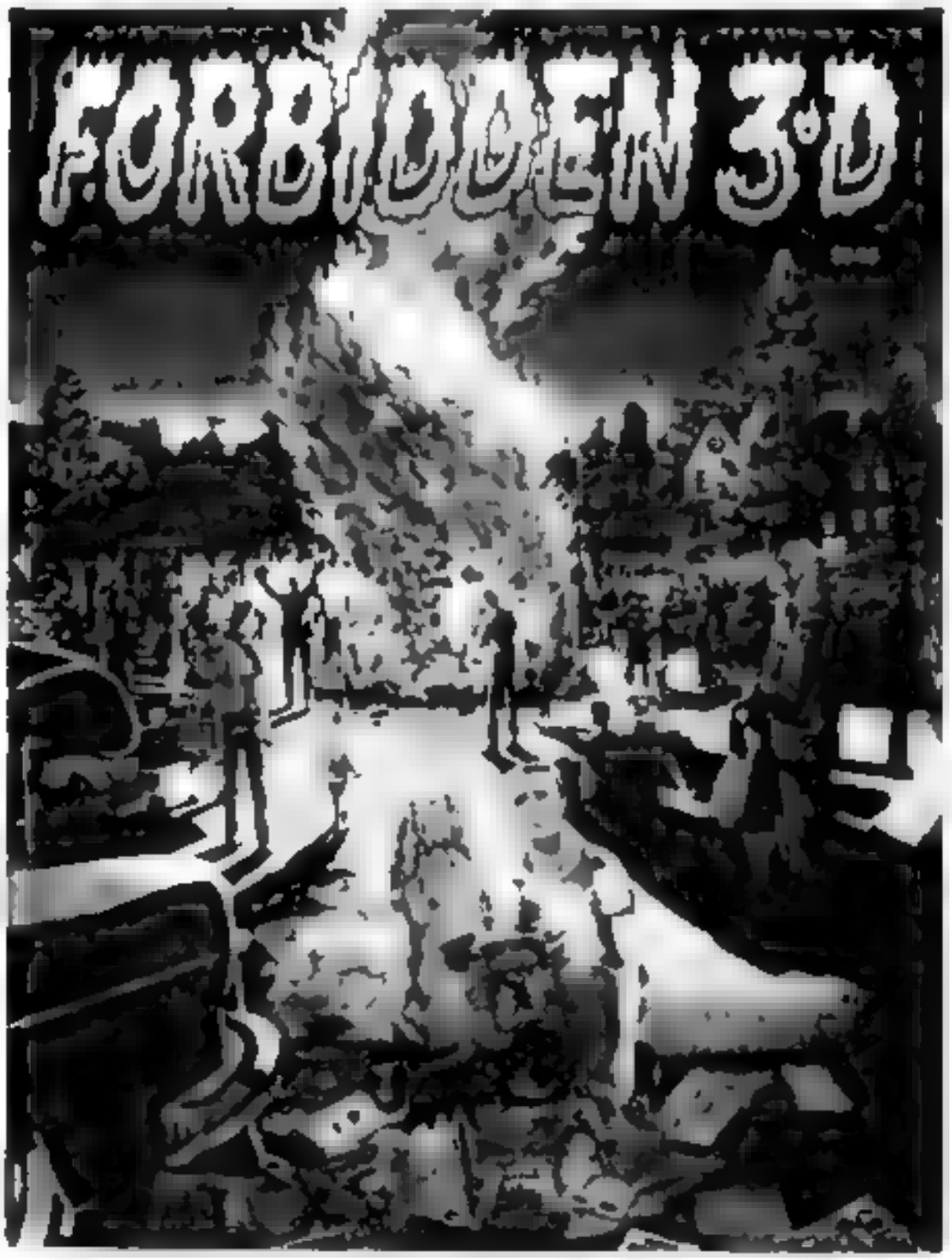
in

J Edgar Hoover

Estes Kefauver

Al Capp

Marya Mannes



Fredric Wertham

William Gaines

John Mason Brown

George Hecht

Here it is: FORBIDDEN 3-D is Ray Zone's magnum opus. Written by Zone and illustrated by Chuck Roblin, Forbidden 3-D tells the story behind comic book burnings of the 1940's and '50's, comics censorship and the formation of the Comics Code Authority. All of the shocking events related in Forbidden 3-D are absolutely true and all the facts presented are a matter of public record. The diverse cast of characters in Forbidden 3-D includes Al Capp, William Gaines, Sterling North, Marya Mannes, George Hecht, John Mason Brown and, of course, the ultimate comic book nemesis Dr. Fredric Wertham. The story behind Wertham's infamous bestseller Seduction of the Innocent is related in its entirety No student of popular culture or America at mid-century should be without a copy of Forbidden 3-D It is a sociological document, a factual history of comic book criticism and a portrait of America at a troubling time in its history. Chuck Roblin's amazing art in this book depicts actual comic books that figured in the controversy as well as AP wire photos and kinetoscopes of the Senate Investigation into comic books in 1954

After reading Forbidden 3-D you will know how and why the Comics Code Authority was formed. You'll be shocked at its incisive look at comic book history. Because of the historically compelling nature of the subject matter of Forbidden 3-D it is being offered in a 2-D version with the new lurid "ChromaScope" process. See why public bonfires of comic books occurred in the 1950's Read Forbidden 3-D 24 pages on finest 100# gloss stock with painted 4-color covers on heavy board

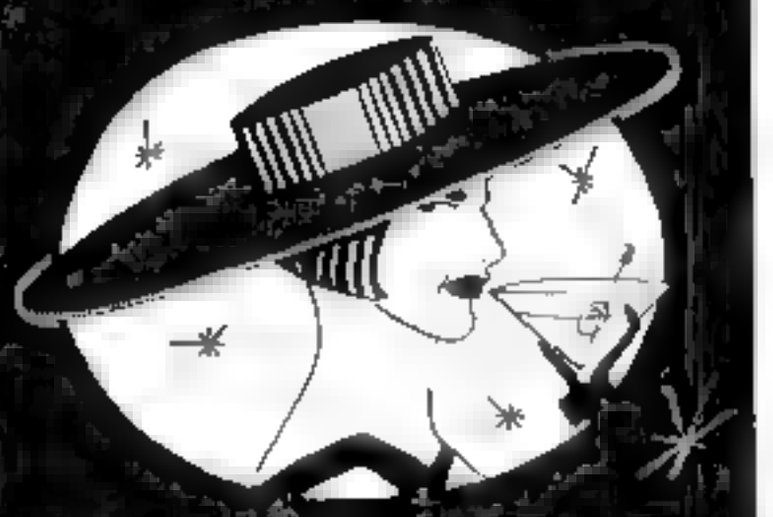
Please Specify:
3-D Version or
2-D ChromaScope Version
Each Version $5.00 Postpaid

Send to.
3-D Zone
PO Box 741159
L A , CA 90004

An absolute charmer! The characters are swingers in the best Sinatra-inspired sense. VERY VICKY is that rare comic where the humor is understated, but definitely visible- imagine Bill Foreyth directing a remake of Where The Boys Are."
HERO ILLUSTRATED

"VERY VICKY is delightful! Thoroughly Modern Millie and Beach Blanket Bingo by way of Dan Clowes mixin' it in with Eddie Campell and Roberta Gregory, with a dash of gin & tonic- wotta comic book! Spin a Sinatra, sip that martini, & get with VERY VICKY!
STEVE BISSETTE

Very Vicky



LIFE HASN'T BEEN THIS FUN SINCE SAMMY LOST HIS EYE!

"VERY VICKY is one cool chick, full of savvy and cool as cubes. Dialogue is uncommon for a comic, more sarcastic than my last family reunion. Add a few martinis, a far-out artist, a visit from God and Lotta Dyphar, and lots of Tab Hunter references and you have a rip roarin' good time that pokes fun at all the Generation X shit. Plus the multi-medium collages at the end of each issue dealing with the Theater of the Absurd By Gregory Damien Grinnell are qué chic!"
-YOUR FLESH

Issue 4 in stores in June!
#1 2nd printing & issue #5 shipping September

Available through Capital, Friendly Frank's, Heroes World or please contact:
Meet Danny Ocean
PO Box 382286
Cambridge, MA 02238
#2, 3 & 4 available -$2.50 each & $1 p&h

Come buy us a drink at the Small Press Expo, June 10th-12th Bethesda, MD!

to the artistic or literary value in Diana's work, and lawyer Scott Boardman (who works for De la Grana) was brought in to help with the process.

"We made the rounds," said Lirot. "We were talking to psychologists, professors... we found a lot of people who agreed that Diana had a right to do what he was doing, but said, 'This stuff is too steamy for me and I would be called in on the carpet if I defended him.' One guy [whose name Lirot preferred to keep undisclosed] was trying to secure tenure at a local university and he told us, 'If I testify, I'm finished.' We went to the [Salvador] Dali museum here, and they declined to help us, which I thought was ironic. I even hired a private investigator to go around to every English professor and art historian."

Although Alston re-established contact with the lawyers on Feb. 22, the Fund did not get involved with expert witness selection until March 11, according to Alston. Alston said she became aware of the expert witness situation through Thom Powers, who got involved through Fantagraphics Books President Gary Groth. One day in early March, Seth Friedman called Groth and approached him about testifying as an expert witness. Groth offered his assistance and told him that he could save the CBLDF costs by staying with his parents, who live in the Pinellas County area. Groth said he was confused, however, as to why Friedman would be calling him regarding trial testimony rather than a representative of the Fund. Groth related the conversation to Powers, which also included mention of Diana's publisher, Shane Bugbee (who publishes under the name Michael Hunt) as a scheduled expert witness Groth was never contacted again about testifying.

Friedman apparently was approached as an expert witness by Lirot at the suggestion of Chuck Shepherd. Friedman agreed, albeit reluctantly, and as a result decided to inquire on his own regarding other possible witnesses Friedman said he called Groth and Last Gasp Publisher Ron Turner, as well as the cartoonist Scott McCloud. Despite this legwork, Friedman was not successful securing any witnesses, but it was not his responsibility and nor was he expected to do so. Friedman's call to Groth did, however, apparently get the CBLDF involved again.

When Groth related his conversation to Powers (who now works at Fantagraphics), Powers called Alston to discuss the situation and suggested that she approach Peter Kuper as a witness, who eventually did fly to Florida to testify, along with Friedman and Bugbee. Alston confirmed she heard of the impasse from Powers. "Frank De la Grana, Scott Boardman and I had been in conversation [since Feb. 22] I didn't understand why there was no mention of [help being needed regarding expert witness selection], because I specifically remember that they didn't bring up the witness list or say that they needed any help

Then Thom called me and said that Seth Friedman and Shane Bugbee were going to be witnesses, at which point I called [Diana's lawyers] immediately on March 11 to find out what was going on." Groth and Friedman could not remember the date of their conversation, but both estimated it to be on the afternoon of Mar. 9 or Mar. 10, which would support this version of events, with Alston calling Diana's lawyers the next day during regular business hours.

Although Bugbee was flown to Florida from Chicago at the expense of the CBLDF, he was ruled out as a witness. Regardless of what he may have had to offer in testimony, Bugbee told the *Journal* that the lawyers decided that his physical appearance — long hair, very "countercultural" — would possibly have biased the jury negatively

Upon notification of the confusion surrounding expert witnesses, Alston and Kitchen prepared a list of six names. Kevin Eastman, Art Spiegelman, Kuper, Jules Feiffer, Neil Gaiman, and Kitchen. Alston phoned this list to the lawyers as well as sending a fax of the list, a copy of which she supplied to the *Journal*

Will Eisner (a Florida resident) was also considered due to his proximity to the trial and the respect he would most likely get from the jury, but according to Kitchen he was not pursued due to the time constraints involved Kitchen felt Eisner deserved, and would have needed, more notice than was possible under the circumstances. According to lawyer Scott Boardman, who handled the expert witness testimony, Eastman declined an invitation to testify, Kitchen was quickly ruled out due to a conflict of interest (as president of the CBLDF), and the others, with the exception of Kuper, Boardman had no luck contacting.

"As soon as I talked to Susan it started to come together," said Boardman. "We were down to the last day, and the prosecution made a motion to strike our amended witness list because we were so late in getting witnesses together It was ridiculous. We got them in right at the end. If we would have had access to a list like that earlier it would have helped a lot. As it was, I was happy speaking with Peter Kuper, and Seth Friedman knew more about 'zines than anybody, so we ran with them."

Berger claims that he attempted to secure witnesses as far back as December When asked who he specifically attempted to secure, Berger replied, "The people I approached all declined, so I don't want to embarrass them." When asked specifically when he attempted to secure witnesses, he said, "Earlier than January. I asked people at Harvey Kurtzman's funeral." Kurtzman's funeral was in February of 1993, but Diana was not even charged until April of 1993, which makes Berger's claim inherently false.

When asked if he was aware of Berger's efforts to secure expert witnesses, Kitchen replied, "Well, is there any paper trail for that?" When informed that there wasn't, Kitchen sim-

ply said, "O.K., there you go."

Lirot, De la Grana and Boardman all maintain that they were unaware of any efforts on Berger's part to help with expert witness selection.

OTHER CBLDF CASES

Both Alston and Kitchen have also admitted that they have received complaints about Berger from other lawyers involved in CBLDF-backed cases, specifically from Gordon Lee's attorney Paul Cadle and Timothy Parks' former lawyer Kathleen Kirwin. Lee and Parks, two comic book retailers, both lost their obscenity trials at the local level and are awaiting appeals. Lee is in Rome, Georgia, Parks is in Sarasota, Florida. Although the *Journal* could not reach Kirwin, who is no longer representing Parks, Alston said that Kirwin had related frustration with Berger to her on occasion at the time of Parks' trial Parks was initially charged in May of 1992, and was convicted in November of 1993.

The *Journal* did speak with Paul Cadle, who related experiences with Berger similar to those Diana's lawyers have told. "After Mr. Lee was convicted, that was when I really had problems getting through to [Berger]. I called him several times and left several messages for him," he said. "For whatever reason, there was never a response." Lee was convicted in February of 1993. Cadle said that Lee was put in the position of footing the attorney's bill himself, and that Lee owed Cadle "a lot of money." He said that they attempted to contact Berger in an effort to get Lee reimbursed for the attorney's fee for a period "of about six months." Cadle claims that he sent a copy of the district court transcript to Berger as well as all other pertinent documentation he had.

Cadle said that he had called and written Berger so many times without receiving a response, all the while running up the charges on Lee's account, that Lee finally just instructed Cadle to stop trying. "I think really and truly that [the CBLDF] was trying to do the right thing. It wasn't like they were saying, 'To heck with you, Lee.' I don't know what was going on with [Berger], but at some point someone, somewhere needed to do something because my client's viewpoint became futile. It was a frustration After a while [Lee] adopted the opinion that he'd been left out to dry," he said.

Cadle said that Lee eventually got through to the Fund himself, and that his client was finally reimbursed in March of 1993, over a year after Lee was convicted. "I don't think it was a matter of conscious neglect; I hope they were just overburdened," said Cadle of Berger and the Fund.

Alston said that, in Berger's defense, she has had difficulty in getting in touch with Cadle, which Kitchen supports. Alston and Kitchen have admitted, however, that they do have letters from Cadle expressing concern over the fact that he was getting no response from Berger. Asked if he believed there to be truth in Cadle's claims despite any possible differences between Cadle and the Fund, Kitchen said, "Sometimes where there's smoke, there's fire."

FULL CIRCLE

Regardless of Berger's status as member of the CBLDF, it appears that the Fund has recognized its problems and taken the necessary steps to insure that it won't have similar problems in the future. With Alston's full-time position and a new toll-free 800 number established for the Fund (1-800-992-2533), lawyers should have little or no difficulty reaching a CBLDF representative. And by retaining Burton Joseph, the CBLDF will have the legal counsel of one of the country's premier First Amendment lawyers.

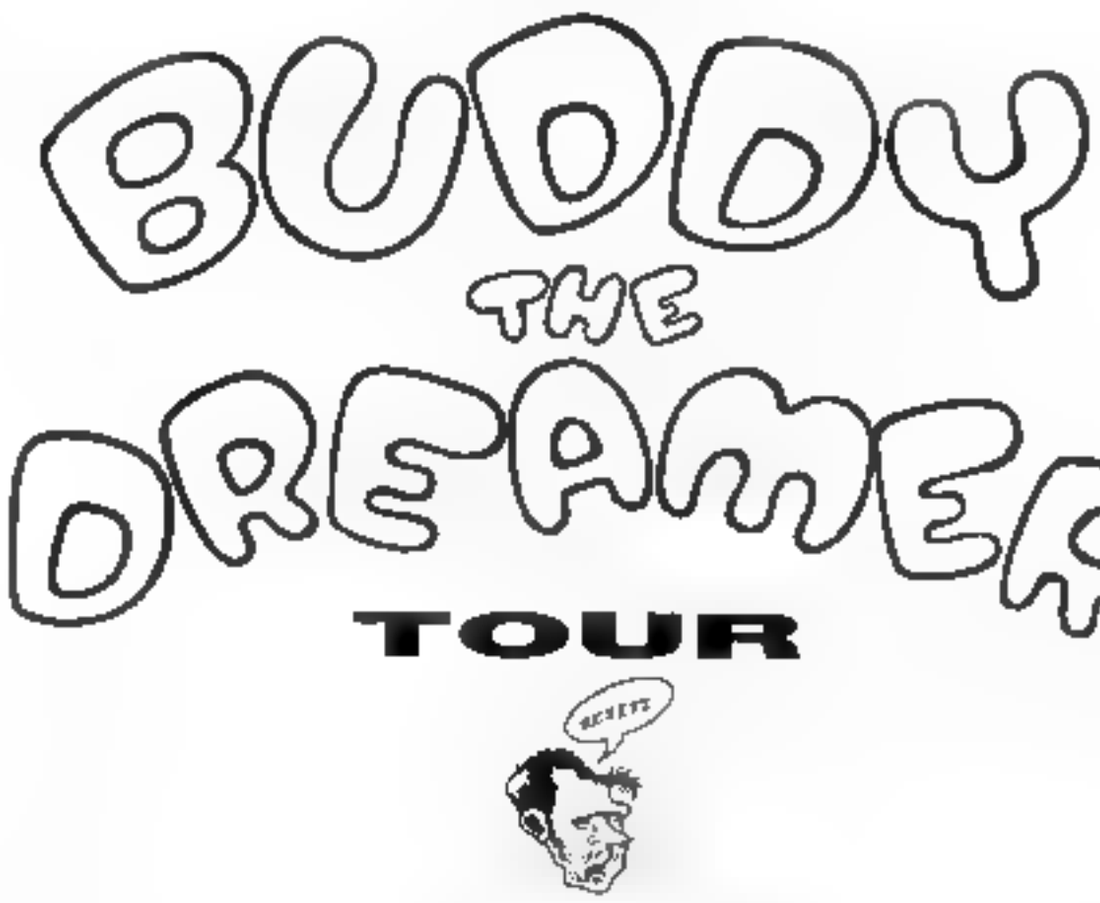
Joseph — a partner of the Chicago-based law firm Barsy, Joseph & Lichtenstein — is listed in Merrill's *Illinois Legal Times* as one of the "Best Lawyers in America in the First Amendment Law Category." His duties with the Fund will be to provide legal advice to the Fund by reviewing current and future cases for appropriate defense strategy and referrals to legal counsel. Joseph has also agreed to assist in conducting seminars and workshops on censorship, legal limitations, display laws, and other issues of concern to comics retailers.

Joseph was first discussed as possible counsel in August of 1993, and Joseph reportedly agreed around that time, having been contacted by Berger Joseph, however, was not officially retained until Feb. 1 of this year, and one source told the *Journal* that Berger was responsible for the long gap. It was reportedly Berger's responsibility to draft a formal proposal of what Joseph's duties would be and how cost effective his counsel would be, in order for the board to review and make a decision. Berger allegedly never did this, and the task was left for Alston to take up. Alston's only comment on the situation was, "[Berger] might have procrastinated actually getting something in writing for the board members to review, but with the holiday season it was difficult getting everything together, so I don't think it was an unreasonable amount of time under the circumstances."

Ketter told the *Journal* that he, on the other hand, did find it to be an unreasonable amount of time. "I thought that was *fait accompli* back in August. We all O.K.'d it, but then it took nearly seven months to officially secure [Joseph] " When asked if he knew what had happened or if he felt Berger had dropped the ball, he only responded, "I don't know."

Ketter added, however, that he is working on one project which should speed up some of the bureaucratic processes of the CBLDF. Ketter said that he wants to establish a formal application process, so that anyone interested in receiving aid from the CBLDF has a specific route to take, eliminating some of the confusion that has apparently existed in the past. "I think that will speed up the process, because right now there is no formal process," he said.

With the internal investigation of Berger still pending, *The Comics Journal* will report the results of the matter next issue. ER



Hey! Meet PETER BAGGE in Person!
A Dream Come True.

Saturday, May 28, AMERICAN BOOKSELLERS CONVENTION, 1 p.m.
Los Angeles Convention Center, Los Angeles, CA
(booksellers only)

Saturday, May 28, MELTDOWN Comics & Collectables, 6-8 p.m.
7511 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA (213) 851-7223

Friday, June10, SEE HEAR, 6-8 p.m.
59 East Seventh Street, New York City (212)505-9781
with *Martini Baton* collaborator **David Carrino**

Saturday, June 11, THE COMIC STOP, 2-4 p.m.
2600 Plymouth Meeting Mall, Plymouth Meeting, PA (just outside Philly)
(215)828-5848
with *Gritbath* creator **Renee French**

Saturday, June 11, ATOMIC BOOKS, 6-8 p.m.
229 West Read Street, Baltimore, MD (410)728-5490
with *Gritbath* creator **Renee French**

Over 150 Professionals Gather at Pro/Con 2

The second annual Pro/Con was held April 20-21 in Oakland, Calif., and featured several industry round-table discussions as well as plenty of "Official Shmooze Time." Pro/Con is the only industry gathering open only to professionals, and this year over 150 people paid $75 to $125 (depending on how early they bought their tickets) to take part in the event.

The two-day program began with a panel entitled "Looking into the Crystal Ball: Future Possibilities in the Comic Book Marketplace." Marvel Editor-in-Chief Tom DeFalco, DC Comics Vice President and Publisher Paul Levitz, Diamond Distributors Vice President Bill Schanes, and former Moondog's owner Gary Colabuono discussed the past year in the industry and tried to predict where it might lead over the next several.

DeFalco opened the discussion by saying the industry had three areas that need to be focused on: the economic future, the creative future, and the physical form the industry will assume over the next few years. He argued that comics are being integrated into mainstream culture through the influx of investment capital by big business and Wall Street, adding "This can only mean we have a really good future ahead of us."

DeFalco ended his remarks by claiming that Marvel, and the rest of the industry, has more talent than ever. "As long as people need stories, we'll be there," DeFalco concluded.

Colabuono followed DeFalco by criticizing Marvel for sending a message that the direct market is not where they want to put their future business. "It would be a shame to ignore the direct market retailer, because only he has the passion to sell these books," said Colabuono. "Without him, the marketplace will not grow as mainstream media."

"I'm thrilled by the present state [of the industry]. I'm very optimistic," said Levitz. He said that comics are on the verge of becoming a mass medium, and that companies need to foster that by focusing on the audience that is being courted and how to attract that audience. Levitz also touched on how technological advancements of recent years open new tools for storytelling which will fundamentally change the industry.

Schanes continued the topic of technology. "We [the distributors] are the conduit that holds the industry together," he said, "and we will be leading the techno-revolution." He cited plans to implement the first national computer tracking system for retail sell-through. Throughout the direct market's history, there has never been an effective way to monitor retailer sell-through (the number of copies for any given title that a retailer sells after receiving them from his distributor).

The discussion continued around the positive and negative aspects of big business involvement in comics, with most attendees agreeing that the future is in entertainment, as opposed to marketing and promotion. DeFalco ended the discussion by asking people not to lose sight of what's important. "We need to read the product and see how wonderful it is," he said.

The opening day continued with panels on "Promoting Your Own Work" (featuring, among others, Malibu Comics' head of promotions Tom Mason), "Creating a Character of Lasting Interest" (with Lobo-creator Roger Slifer), and "Career Changes in the Comic Book Industry" (which included Jim Shooter, who discussed being fired from Marvel and Valiant).

The day also featured a lunch sponsored by Marvel Comics and an hour and a half of "Official Shmooze Time!" Malibu Comics ended the day by sponsoring an evening reception of three hours of "Unofficial Shmooze Time."

Day two began with "Approaching the Blank Page," a panel which some audience members criticized for focusing exclusively on mainstream-type collaborations — from writer to penciller to inker to letterer, etc. The convention was attended primarily by people associated with mainstream companies, although some alternative creators such as Roberta Gregory (*Naughty Bits*), Colin Upton (*Big Thing*) and Donna Barr (*The Desert Peach*) did attend. Barr was one who spoke up during the panel to criticize the mainstream focus, saying the so-called "Marvel Style" was completely inapplicable to writer-artists like herself.

The day's second panel followed a lunch sponsored by DC Comics and another "Shmooze Time" session. The panel, "Hollywood and the Comics Creator," featured a discussion about Hollywood contracts. Kitchen Sink owner Denis Kitchen led the discussion with anecdotes regarding his involvement with Hollywood via *The Crow* and *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs*. Jean-Marc Lofficier, the comic book packager and translator, prepared a 15-page handout to accompany the discussion, titled "Notes about Option/Purchase Agreements."

The round-table discussions ended with a one-sided panel covering "The Pros and Cons of Creator Ownership." Jeff Smith (*Bone*), Scott McCloud (*Understanding Comics*), and Chris Claremont (*X-Men*) all generally agreed that it is important to be aware of and fight for creators' rights, although Claremont said that work-for-hire can often be more financially lucrative.

Pro/Con 2 was brought to a close with an evening celebration of the late Jack Kirby, sponsored by Topps Comics. The two day event was attended by such professionals as Larry Marder, Peter David, Dick Giordano, Kurt Busiek, Archie Goodwin, Bernie Wrightson, Jim Starlin, Jim Shooter, Karen Berger, Trina Robbins, cat yronwode, Maggie Thompson, Jim Valentino, Dave Olbrich and many others.

The Comics Journal was potentially interested in running transcripts from some of Pro/Con's more interesting panel discussions, but the Board of Directors would not grant us the approval to do so. "This is a private convention open only to professionals," Event Coordinator Brian Uhlenbrock told the *Journal*, "and we have no interest in sharing it with the public."

Pro/Con 2 was also the site of the most recent meeting of the Comic Book Professionals Association. CBPA, an organization open to any professional in the comic book industry, is an attempt foster communication and education throughout every level of the industry. CBPA has such long-term goals as obtaining health care coverage for professionals as well as providing legal counsel for creators negotiating contracts with publishers. *The Comics Journal* will report more on this organization in the future.

ER

Acclaim Buys Voyager for $65 million

Acclaim Entertainment announced on April 7 that it planned to buy Voyager Communications Inc., publisher of Valiant Comics, for $65 million in cash and stock. The proportion of cash and stock has not been determined yet, according to a spokeswoman from Acclaim. A software company based in Oyster Bay, N.Y., Acclaim said that with the acquisition it wanted to diversify into comic book publishing and create video games based on the characters of Valiant, which is based in New York City.

The closing of the acquisition remains subject to the satisfactory completion of due diligence, execution of a definitive acquisition agreement and the obtaining of various regulatory and third party approvals, including the approval of Acclaim shareholders.

Voyager was the fourth largest comic book publisher in 1993 in the United States. Founded in 1990, Voyager publishes 16 monthly titles under the Valiant imprint, including *Ninjak* and *Magnus Robot Fighter*. Voyager also publishes custom comic book projects, and has worked for such companies as Kraft, Nintendo, and Kentucky Fried Chicken.

It is intended, according to Acclaim, that Valiant Publisher and Chief Executive Officer Steven J. Massarsky and other key executives will continue to lead the publishing operations under long-term employment agreements with Acclaim. Valiant was previously owned jointly by the investment banking group Triumph Capital, Massarsky, Senior Vice President Jon Hartz and Editor-in-Chief Bob Layton. Valiant Marketing Director Marty Stever said the deal was "great for both companies. The management won't change because they love how we're doing things."

Shares of Acclaim rose $1.25, or 13.5 percent, to $18.125, in NASDAQ trading (under the National Market System symbol AKLM) the day the deal was announced. A week before the deal, Acclaim failed to get renewal of a lucrative contract with WMS Industries of Chicago. The contract gave Acclaim the rights to convert two popular coin-operated video games, Mortal Kombat and NBA Jam, to home video games. *The New York Times* reported that as much as 75 percent of Acclaim's revenue comes from product licensed from WMS.

Leonard Brecken, an analyst who follows Acclaim for Oppenheimer & Company, commented on the deal to the *Times*. "On the surface, the acqusition is positive because it addresses some of the revenue replacement relating to WMS," he was quoted as saying. Brecken added, however, that although Voyager was profitable, investors and shareholders might be wary of the acquisition because the comic book industry has a lower potential for growth than the video game business. He said that Acclaim would have a difficult time replacing revenue from Mortal Kombat and NBA Jam.

The same day the deal with Voyager was announced, Acclaim also announced that it would create its first arcade video games for Sega Enterprises Ltd.

Acclaim's net income for the second fiscal quarter of this year, ending Feb. 28, was up 97% percent to $10.6 million, or 24 cents a share. Revenue, driven by a strong Christmas season, rose 61 percent to $115.5 million, according to company reports. **ER**

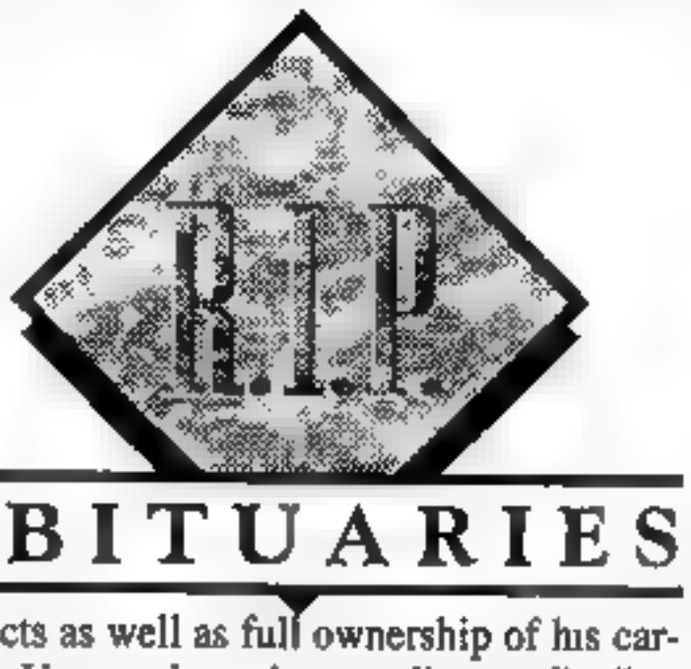
IT STARTED AS A COMIC BOOK

THE CROW

MAY 10 - JULY 9

Artist Signing Sunday May 15

Walter Lantz Dead at 93



Walter Lantz, the animator and producer who created the cartoon characters Woody Woodpecker and Andy Panda, died March 22 in Burbank, Calif. The cause was heart disease, according to a report in *the New York Times*. Lantz was 93, and no immediate family members survive.

Lantz made over 800 animated shorts in his career, with 200 or so featuring the hyperkinetic "ha-ha-ha-HA-ha" red-headed Woody Woodpecker. Lantz was born on April 27, 1900, and at age 15 he began his artistic career washing brushes for *Little Nemo in Slumberland* creator Winsor McCay. At age 16, he was hired by the Hearst newspaper family to work in their new animation studio, where he contributed to animated projects of Hearst comic strip characters such as Krazy Kat, the Katzenjammer Kids, and Happy Hooligan. Lantz was promoted to full-fledged animator status within two years, and in the late '20s, Lantz began working for Universal and helped set up the cartoon studio which would secure his fame.

Lantz was an early proponent of creators' rights in a field which treated its artists as little more than hired hands. Lantz negotiated a special arrangement with Universal which granted him producer status on his own animated projects as well as full ownership of his cartoons. Universal acted primarily as a distributor of Lantz's work, an uncommon arrangement for the time.

When the Chicago Zoo gained national notoriety for the donation of a rare panda, Lantz capitalized on the situation and created Andy Panda in 1939. "Life Begins For Andy Panda," the first appearance of the character, parodied a popular Andy Hardy feature of the era.

Woody Woodpecker first appeared in an Andy Panda short from 1940 titled "Knock Knock," and soon after the character was the star of its own shorts, securing a place in popular culture with its trademark machine gun laugh. "The Woody Woodpecker Song" was nominated for an Academy Award in 1948 for best song, and despite losing, the catchy tune is fondly remembered by generations of fans who grew up with Lantz's creations.

Lantz retired in 1976, spending his time rendering postmodern oil paintings of Woody Woodpecker as "Blue Boy" and the "Mona Lisa." In 1979, Lantz received an Academy Award for lifetime achievement for his contributions to the art of animation from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Several Woody Woodpecker artifacts were added to the Smithsonian Institution collection in 1982. Lantz was also honored by a star on the Walk of Fame on Hollywood Boulevard in California in 1986. **ER**

3 OUT OF 4 GIRLS DRESSED AS "DEATH" AGREE*!!
LETHARGIC COMICS IS A HUMOR EXTRAVAGANZA OF SIGHT, SOUND & TASTE**!

LETHARGIC COMICS is on sale in fine comic stores EVERYWHERE! However...if your local store isn't carrying LETHARGIC...

BE BRAVE & SUBSCRIBE!

☐ 6 issues only $20

☐ sample of our most recent issue:$3

(postage & handling always included!)

name _____

address _____

state/prov. _____ zip/postal code _____

start my subscription with issue # _____.

Send to ALPHA PRODUCTIONS, P.O.Box 1172, Rockland, ME, 04841.

Please make checks or money orders payable to ALPHA PRODUCTIONS.

LETHARGIC COMICS #4 on sale in MAY

Published bi-monthly by ALPHA PRODUCTIONS

*results obtained by independent scientific survey. **sound and taste not included. Can U Dig It?

Fleener exhibit

La Luz de Jesus Gallery in Los Angeles, Calif will be showing approximately 15 original pieces by Mary Fleener (*Slutburger*, *Twisted Sisters*) from May 6 through May 27. Several of the pieces will be experiments in Day-Glo colors, which will be displayed in what Fleener calls, "the hippie love-in room, with black light [to highlight the Day-Glo], incense, the whole nine yards." Most of the show will feature all-new paintings, and Fleener will be debuting her efforts in clay sculpture, a new medium for her. The show also includes Nathan Ota, a former student of Burne Hogarth. Ota is a professional illustrator and has done album covers for Henry Rollins, among others. For more information, call (213) 651-4875.

ZAP #13 Celebration

Following the Fleener exhibit, La Luz de Jesus is proud to present the premiere exhibition of the original art from *ZAP* #13. On Friday, June 3, from 8 to 11:30 p.m., all six of the surviving *ZAP* artists — R. Crumb, Victor Moscoso, Robert Williams, S. Clay Wilson, Gilbert Shelton and Spain Rodriguez, will be in attendance at a gala opening celebration. On Saturday, June 4, most of the artists will return for a signing from 3 to 6 p.m. *ZAP* #13 is dedicated to the memory of *ZAP* artist Rick Griffin, who died in a motorcycle accident in 1992. After 14 *ZAP* issues since 1967 (there is a *ZAP* #0), these six grandaddies of the underground comix movement will honor Griffin's memory by putting *ZAP* to rest forever. The original artwork will be on display from June 3 through July 3. The six artists will be displaying other work as well, and will be offering plenty of *ZAP*-related merchandise. For more information, call (213) 651-4875.

Kartoon Fever Starring Waldo the Cat

From June 2 through July 20, Four Color Images will showcase *Kartoon Fever*, a show of the works of Kim and Simon Deitch. Focusing on the world of Waldo the Cat, the exhibit will feature animation cels from fictucious Waldo cartoons, the infamous Mishkin Murals (chronicling Ted Mishkin's spiritual and psychological deterioration), and several pieces reflecting the Deitches' creative process, including penciled layouts, inked pages and hand-colored prints. A limited edition print, produced in conjunction with Fantagraphics, and commemorative T-Shirts are also planned. For more information call (212) 431-4234.

Kirby, Romita and Ayers Re-Create Lost Silver Age Covers

Sotheby's is holding a comic art sale and public exhibition of 22 Marvel cover re-creations by veterans John Romita, Dick Ayers, and the late Jack Kirby. The re-creations are redrawn replicas, created in the same manner as the originals, of key Silver Age comics such as *Fantastic Four* #1 and are larger in size than the original covers, most of which have long been lost or destroyed. The recreated covers represent much of Kirby's final artistic output, having been completed shortly before his passing in February, and also represent the last time that the frequent collaborators Kirby and Ayers worked together. The works will be on display at Sotheby's Los Angeles office on June 7 and 8, with a New York exhibition taking place from June 11-17. The works will be auctioned in Sotheby's New York auction house on June 18. For more information call (212) 606-7176.

EXHIBITS & EVENTS

A Kim Deitch-drawn invitation to his Four Color Images exhibition.

Goo-Goo-Googly Eyes Exhibit

Barney Google and Snuffy Smith: 75 Years of an American Legend will premiere June 19 at the Cartoon, Graphic, and Photographic Arts Research Library in Columbus, OH. The exhibit documents the history of this classic comic strip and the two cartoonists responsible for it. The strip was created in 1919 by Billy DeBeck, and his assistant Fred Lasswell assumed responsibility for the strip upon DeBeck's death in 1942. The long running cultural icon still appears in over 900 papers worldwide. The exhibit, sponsored by King Features Syndicate and the Friends of the Libraries of The Ohio State University, will run through Sept. 5. For more information, call (614) 292-0538.

The Crow Exhibit

The Words & Pictures Museum is exhibiting the original comic book artwork of James O'Barr's *The Crow*. The exhibit will run May 10 through July 9, and is timed to coincide with the opening of *The Crow* feature film starring the late Brandon Lee. For more information, call (413) 586-8545.

Stripdagen Haarlem

June 3 to 5 will see the "Stripdagen Haarlem" comics convention taking place in the Dutch town of Haarlem. Centering around the bookfair near the city's medieval cathedral, the convention's main exhibitions will showcase Lorenzo Mattotti (Italy), Enki Bilal (France), Mary Tourtel "and followers" (UK), ex-Yugoslav artists such as Nenad Vukmirovic, Zoran Penevski & Dubravko Matakovic, and Martin Lodewijk/Henk Kuijpers (Holland). Smaller exhibits will feature political satirists, young talent from Holland and abroad (*POSSE* and *Pelure Amère*), not to mention Disney, Alberto Breccia, Jack Kirby, and Dutch artist Peter Pontiac. Bands, animated films, and pubs will add to the mirth. For more information, write to Stripdagen, Postbus 132, 2000AC Haarlem, The Netherlands. Phone: Joost Pollmann (023) 329506 or Michiel Hogenboom (023) 317032.

Grober Unfug

About sixty Dan Clowes originals, stretching from his early *Lloyd Llewellyn* work to the current "Ghost World," will be exhibited in "Clowestrophobia" at the Berlin gallery/comics shop. The show opens on June 10 — Clowes is scheduled to attend — and runs until August 20.

Grober Unfug's address is Zossener Strasse 32-33, 10961, Berlin, Germany; phone. (030) 691 32 30. This is their third American Independents exhibit in as many years.

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée

The Belgian Chamber of Comics Experts has awarded its annual prizes. This year's winners will be exhibited until May 29 at the C.B.B.D., 20 rue des Sables, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgium. Phone: (02) 219.19.80. Fax: (02) 219.19.80.

Tsai Chih Chung Tour

Taiwanese cartoonist Tsai Chih Chung and his translator Brian Bruya are touring in connection with the publication of *Zen Speaks*, a comics adaptation of Zen classics. The dates are: May 17, Seattle, Wa.; May 18, Portland, Ore., May 19, Eugene, Ore.; May 20-21, San Francisco, Ca. Check your local newspaper for details.

ER/MT

ekly World News

VOL.8 Issue 25

30604

14, 1994

ARTIST'S CONCEPTION of the recently reopened Fantagraphics vaults.

ANCIENT REMAINS UNEARTHED in Fantagraphics Warehouse!

SEATTLE, WA— While searching through the bowels of the cavernous Fantagraphics warehouse, comic book archivist Gary Groth discovered a cache of graphic novelties long thought to be out-of-print and lost to the world. Limited quantities of this rare material are now being made available to the general public on a first come, first served basis.

WORD BALLOONS No. 1 THE MAGAZINE OF THE COMIC ARTS
Better than a prehistoric mosquito stuck in a chunk of amber! It's a paleolithic fanzine (circa 1974) from a modern-day comic book mogul, Gary Groth. Take a compromising peek into the naive fanboy beginnings of a seasoned professional Neal Adams, Jeff Jones, Archie Goodwin, and more! This rare find is a bargain at half the price! $5.00

ALWAYS COMES TWILIGHT
Another long lost relic from the ancient past! From the glory days of 1976 comes this fanzine designed and co-published by young magnate-in-the-making Gary G. Groth. Stories, illustrations and comics pages by Jan Strnad, Steve Leialoha, Dennis Fujitake, Ron Wilber, and much, much more! $5.00

FOCUS ON JACK COLE
Perfectly preserved prehistoric Plastic Man! Startling true story! Stre-e-etch your knowledge of the creator of Plastic Man, Jack Cole, one of the greats of the Golden Age. Biographical info, pages and covers from Police Comics, Plastic Man, checklists—for collectors and dilettantes alike. $5.95

THE SURVIVORS Volumes 1 & 2
Talons of Blood! The Eyes That Burned! *The Survivors!* Discover one of the most popular adventure strips in Belgium, brought to American readers in two glorious full-color 48-page graphic novels. Gorgeously drawn futuristic excitement from Belgian cartoonist Hermann. $4.95 each.

TALES FROM THE TRIGAN EMPIRE
Jimmy Hoffa found in Seattle warehouse! And, an even better find, this long thought out-of-print volume! The saga of a planet billions of miles from earth, upon which the mighty Trigan Empire rose and fell. Full-colour deluxe over-sized hardcover British edition. $35.00.

OPERATION SATURN
The evil ruler of Saturnia plans to conquer Earth using robot ships! Fasten your seatbelts and blast off to investigate the mysterious remote-controlled spaceships. This is the rare third volume of facsimile reproductions of the adventures of Dan Dare, pilot of the future. Full-colour hardbound deluxe over sized British collector's edition. $35.00.

BARNEY AND THE BLUE NOTE
A rare gem. Poetic story of sex, drugs and jazz. This collaboration by regular *RAW* contributors, French artist Loustal and writer Paringaux, results in a beautiful full-color graphic novel. $9.95

[ ] YES! I want to join the Fantagraphics Explorers Club. I have enclosed check or money order, payable to Fantagraphics Books, for the following finds

[ ] WORD BALLOONS No. 1 THE MAGAZINE OF THE COMIC ARTS $5.00
[ ] ALWAYS COMES TWILIGHT $5.00
[ ] FOCUS ON JACK COLE $5.95
[ ] THE SURVIVORS Volume One $4.95
[ ] THE SURVIVORS Volume Two $4.95
[ ] TALES FROM THE TRIGAN EMPIRE $35.00
[ ] OPERATION SATURN $35.00
[ ] BARNEY AND THE BLUE NOTE $9.95

TOTAL $_____
(Please add $3.00 to cover postage for 1-3 items, or $6.00 for 4 or more)

[ ] Charge it to my account! I want to pay for my rare relics with my [ ]Visa or [ ]MasterCard

credit card number _____ expiration date _____

name _____

address _____

city _____ state _____ zip _____

Mail orders to Fantastic Finds, 7463 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115.
Or just call TOLL FREE 1-800-657-1100 with order total and credit card handy.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Kustom Kulture: Past, Present, & Future

The Kustom Kulture panel, from left to right: Jim Bruckner, Suzanne Williams, Gary Groth, and Robert Williams. Photo by Becky Wilson.

Kustom Kulture, the critically-acclaimed exhibition of the custom car/comix/beach culture of the '50s, '60s and '70s, opened at Seattle, Washington's Center on Contemporary Art (COCA) on April 8. COCA sponsored a panel discussion on April 9 to celebrate the event, which primarily focuses on the works of Robert Williams, Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, and the late Von Dutch.

The panel featured Williams, along with his wife Suzanne, Fantagraphics Books President Gary Groth, art collector James Brucker, *Kustom Kulture* curator Greg Escalante, and *Los Angeles Times* art critic Zan Dubin. Escalante opened the discussion by explaining how he organized the exhibit in an attempt to get this art form recognized. Williams followed with historical anecdotes about how he got into hot rods and involved with Roth and Dutch. Williams talked about growing up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the lack of artistic possibilities confronting him. "The only art world that existed was... adobe house paintings," he said.

Williams talked of moving to Southern California in 1963 in an effort to succeed as an abstract painter. Through the unemployment office in Los Angeles, Williams got work as an art director for Roth. Williams described the Roth studios as a place overflowing with imagination, completely divorced from the traditional art scene. It was here that Williams began experimenting with the psychedelic paintings that would make him famous.

Williams diverged into a discussion of EC Comics, one of his influences, and how the conservative climate of the early '60s and the formation of the Comics Code Authority spelled their end. It wasn't until the late '60s and the turmoil of the Vietnam War began to uproot the existing social structure that underground artists such as Williams and his *ZAP* *Comix* peers were perceived as contributors to a valuable social revolution.

This line of discussion brought a question from the audience regarding the similarities between car culture and comix. Groth offered the suggestion that the differences are more interesting than the similarities. He said that the main point of convergence was a rebellion against the status quo and mass culture, but said that Roth and Dutch had little specific influence on Robert Crumb and the rest of the *ZAP* crew. The question spawned a brief history of underground comix, their decline, and the subsequent rise in the '80s of the alternative comics scene.

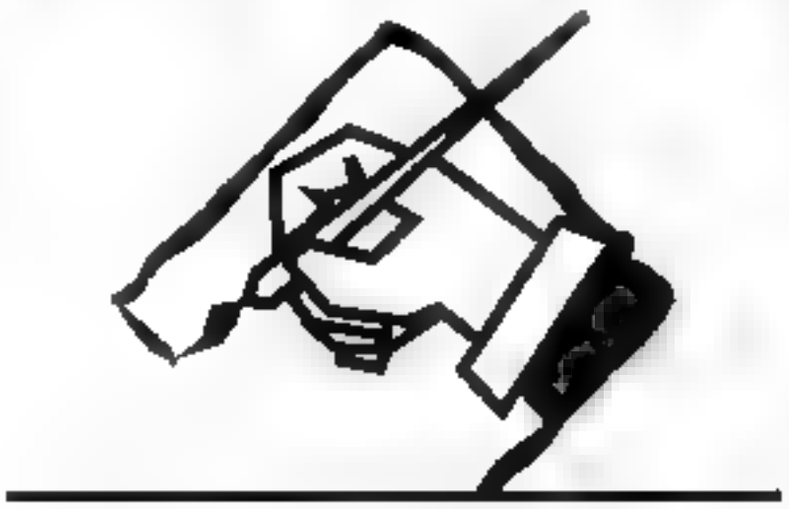
The panel continued with stories from Suzanne Williams and Brucker, who related their involvement with Williams, Roth and Dutch. Several anecdotes regarding Dutch were told, including a few about his legendary temper and how he would "go Tasmanian" and "freak out" on occasion.

The panelists discussed how the entire custom car culture has been ignored by the mainstream art world, despite the influence it has had on generations of modern artists. Williams then described the impact of the stock market crash of Oct. 25, 1987. "It dragged down the entire art world," Williams said, but added that the effect opened up the art market that exists now. Previously, art prices had reached ridiculous highs, but then crashed, opening new doors. "A hundred years from now they will look back at this century and say, 'the music of this time was rock and roll, and the art of this time was cartoons,'" he added.

This was followed by a question from Groth asking Williams how he feels about his acceptance into the world of fine art. "I'm not accepted," Williams replied. "I've got a little toehold in it." Williams described his problems, such as how hard it is to get gallery showings, and how he has been picketed by feminist groups. He then "confessed" that he is not a fine artist, but rather a cartoonist. "A hack cartoonist," he joked.

Last Gasp Publisher Ron Turner joined the panelists toward the end of the discussion, which saw the biggest debate of the event. "The common denominator that ran through a lot of the culture we are talking about — EC Comics, *Mad*, *Kustom Kulture*, underground comix, and today's alternative comics — is a sense of rebellion against mass uniformity, an opposition to the status quo," said Groth. He then pointed out how Turner and Williams had made points about hot-rodders being conservative and Republican in nature. Groth found this to be a contradiction in terms: Turner and Williams saw hot rods as the first American underground culture, yet the people involved were the same types who supported the Vietnam War. The panel ended with a short debate over Groth's point. Turner defended the perceived hot-rodder dichotomy as simply being a group of "red-blooded Americans, except they didn't like the cops."

ER



A R T

NEWS

Vertigo Seizes Bulk of Eisner Nominations

Vertigo creators and titles, led by *Sandman* and *Hellblazer*, dominate the nominations for the 1993 Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards. The nominees were selected by a five-person judging panel that considered comic books shipped to retailers between Jan. 1 and Dec. 21, 1993.

DC Comics (including Vertigo) snagged 32 nominations; Dark Horse was second with 11. Kitchen Sink and Marvel both had ten, Fantagraphics had eight, and Aardvark-Vanaheim received seven. Both Cartoon Books and Image had four nominations, the remaining ballot spots are shared by Bongo Comics, Gladstone, Drawn & Quarterly, Rubber Blanket Press, Topps, Last Gasp, NBM, Palliard, Mirage and Slave Labor. In all, Vertigo accounted for 23 nominations, with 13 of those going to *Sandman*-related comics and creators.

Individuals associated with the most nominations are Dave Sim (eight), Alan Moore (five), Neil Gaiman (five), Garth Ennis (four), Chris Bachalo (four), Jeff Smith (four) and Alex Ross (four). Marvel received its most nominations ever, due primarily to *Marvels* (five nominations). Other projects receiving multiple nominations included *Cerebus* (seven), *Spawn* (five), *Bone* (four), and many with two.

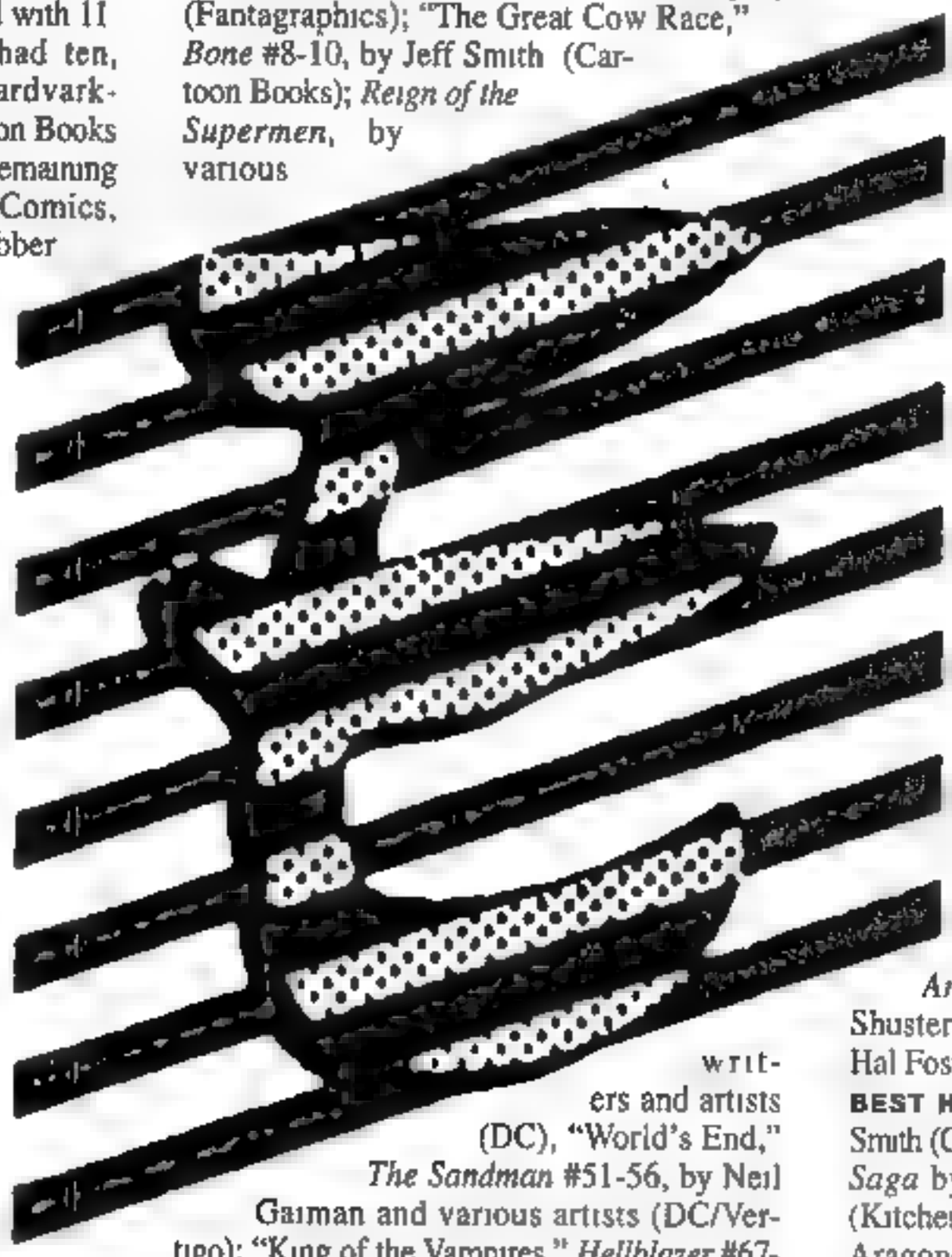
Ballots are currently being mailed to more than 5,000 creators, publishers, editors, retailers, and distributors, and will be tabulated by Mel Thompson and Associates. The results will be announced on Aug. 4 at the San Diego ComicCon.

The complete list of nominees, as selected by judges Mark Askwith (associate producer, *Prisoners of Gravity* Canadian TV show), Mimi Cruz (co-owner/manager, Night Flight Comics), Michael T. Gilbert (creator, *Mr. Monster*), Barry Short (owner, 21st Century Comics), and Mark Yturralde (vice-president, San Diego ComicCon), follows.

BEST SINGLE ISSUE: *Batman Adventures: Mad Love* by Paul Dini and Bruce Timm (DC); "A Crossing Over," *Spawn* #10, by Dave Sim and Todd McFarlane (Image); "A Little Knowledge," *Groo* #100, by Sergio Aragonés with Mark Evanier (Marvel), "Monsters," *Marvels* #2, by Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross (Marvel); "Ramadan," *The Sandman* #50, by Neil Gaiman and P. Craig Russell (DC/Vertigo)

BEST SHORT STORY: "The Amazing Colossal Homer," *Simpsons Comics* #1, By Steve Vance and Bill Morrison (Bongo); "Big Man," *Rubber Blanket* #3, by David Mazzucchelli (Rubber Blanket Press); "I Strive for Realism," *Concrete Eclectica* #2, by Paul Chadwick (Dark Horse); "The Origin of Dan Pussey," *Eightball* #12, by Dan Clowes (Fantagraphics); "Tainted Love," by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, in *Vertigo Jam* (DC/Vertigo)

BEST SERIALIZED STORY: "Abortion Trilogy," *Naughty Bits* #6-8, by Roberta Gregory (Fantagraphics); "The Great Cow Race," *Bone* #8-10, by Jeff Smith (Cartoon Books); *Reign of the Supermen*, by various writers and artists (DC), "World's End," *The Sandman* #51-56, by Neil Gaiman and various artists (DC/Vertigo); "King of the Vampires," *Hellblazer* #67-69, by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon (DC/Vertigo)



BEST CONTINUING SERIES: *Bone* by Jeff Smith (Cartoon Books); *Cerebus* by Dave Sim and Gerhard (Aardvark-Vanaheim); *Hellblazer* by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon (DC/Vertigo); *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman and various artists (DC/ Vertigo); *Shade, the Changing Man* by Peter Milligan and Chris Bachalo (DC/Vertigo)

BEST LIMITED SERIES: *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear*, by Frank Miller and John Romita Jr. (Marvel); *Death: The High Cost of Living*, by Neil Gaiman and Chris Bachalo (DC/Vertigo); *The Golden Age*, by James Robinson and Paul Smith (DC); *Jonah Hex: Two-Gun Mojo*, by Joe R. Lansdale and Timothy Truman (DC/Vertigo), *Marvels*, by Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross (Marvel)

BEST ANTHOLOGY: *Dark Horse Presents*, edited by Randy Stradley (Dark Horse); *Hard Looks*, edited by Jerry Prosser (Dark Horse); *Ray Bradbury Comics*, edited by Howard Zimmerman (Topps), *Real Stuff*, edited by Dennis Eichhorn (Fantagraphics); *Vertigo Jam*, edited by Karen Berger and others (DC/ Vertigo)

BEST GRAPHIC ALBUM — NEW: *Billie Holiday*, by José Muñoz and Carlos Sampayo (Fantagraphics); *A Small Killing*, by Alan Moore and Oscar Zarate (VG Graphics/Dark Horse), *The Upturned Stone*, Scott Hampton (Kitchen Sink)

BEST GRAPHIC ALBUM — REPRINT (MODERN MATERIAL): *The Best of Drawn & Quarterly*, edited by Chris Oliveros, Marina Lesenko, and Steve Solomos (Drawn & Quarterly); *Blood Club*, by Charles Burns (Kitchen Sink); *Cerebus: Flight* (Mothers and Daughters, book 1) by Dave Sim and Gerhard (Aardvark-Vanaheim), *The Complete Bojeffries Saga*, by Alan Moore and Steve Parkhouse (Kitchen Sink); *R. Crumb Draws the Blues*, by R. Crumb (Last Gasp)

BEST ARCHIVAL COLLECTION: *Carl Barks Library* album series (Gladstone); *The Complete Little Nemo in Slumberland*, vol. 6 by Winsor McCay (Fantagraphics), *Flash Gordon Sundays*, vols. 5 6, by Alex Raymond (Kitchen Sink); *Superman Archives*, vol. 2, by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (DC); *Tarzan in Color*, vols. 2-5, by Hal Foster (NBM)

BEST HUMOR PUBLICATION: *Bone* by Jeff Smith (Cartoon Books), *The Complete Bojeffries Saga* by Alan Moore and Steve Parkhouse (Kitchen Sink); *Groo the Wanderer* by Sergio Aragonés and Mark Evanier (Marvel Epic); *Milk and Cheese* by Evan Dorkin (Slave Labor); *Simpsons Comics* by Steve Vance, Bill Morrison, and Sondra Ray (Bongo)

BEST WRITER: Peter David, *The Incredible Hulk: Future Imperfect* (Marvel); Garth Ennis, *Hellblazer* (DC/ Vertigo); Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman, Death: The High Cost of Living* (DC/Vertigo); Alan Moore, *1963*; *Spawn* #8 (Image), *A Small Killing* (VG Graphics/ Dark Horse); Dave Sim, *Cerebus* (Aardvark-Vanaheim); *Spawn* #10 (Image)

BEST WRITER/ARTIST OR CARTOONIST: Phil Foglio, *XXXenophile* (Palliard Press); Roberta Gregory, *Naughty Bits* (Fantagraphics); Stan Sakai, *Usagi Yojimbo* (Fantagraphics-Mirage); Dave Sim, *Cerebus* (Aardvark-Vanaheim); Jeff Smith, *Bone* (Cartoon Books); William Van Horn, *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories; Donald Duck Adventures* (Gladstone)

BEST PAINTER (INTERIOR): Mark Chiarello, *Batman/Houdini: The Devil's Workshop* (DC); Scott Hampton, *The Upturned Stone* (Kitchen Sink); Teddy Kristiansen, *Grendel Tales: Four*

Devils, One Hell (Dark Horse); Alex Ross, *Marvels* (Marvel)

BEST PENCILLER/INKER OR PENCILLER/INKER TEAM: Chris Bachalo/Mark Buckingham, *Death: The High Cost of Living* (DC/Vertigo); Mike Mignola/Kevin Nowlan, *Aliens: Salvation* (Dark Horse); John Romita Jr./Al Williamson, *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear* (Marvel), P Craig Russell/ P. Craig Russell, *The Sandman* #50 (DC/ Vertigo); Dave Sim/ Gerhard, *Cerebus* (Aardvark-Vanaheim); Chris Sprouse/Karl Story, *Legionnaires* (DC); Bruce Timm/Bruce Timm, *Batman Adventures. Mad Love* (DC)

BEST COLORIST: Joe Chiodo, *Wild C.A.T.s, Deathblow* (Image); Steve Oliff and Ruben Rude/Olyoptics, *Spawn* (Image), Matt Hollingsworth, *Aliens: Labyrinth, Aliens· Salvation, Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Dark Horse), Joe Matt, *Batman/Grendel* (Comico/DC); Daniel Vozzo, *The Sandman, Shade, the Changing Man* (DC/Vertigo); Tom Ziuko, *Hellblazer* (DC/Vertigo)

BEST LETTERER: Ken Bruzenak, *Batman/Grendel* (Comico/DC), *Batman/Houdini* (DC); Todd Klein, *The Shadow* (Dark Horse), *The Sandman, The Demon, Jonah Hex: Two-Gun Mojo, Dark Joker· The Wild, Hellblazer* (DC/Vertigo), Bob Lappan, *Understanding Comics* (Kitchen Sink); Dave Sim, *Cerebus* (Aardvark-Vanaheim)

BEST COVER ARTIST: Brian Bolland, *Animal Man* (DC/Vertigo), *Wonder Woman; Legends of the Dark Knight* #50 (DC); John Bolton, *Aliens/Predator: The Deadliest of the Species* (Dark Horse), Glen Fabry, *Hellblazer, Vertigo Jam* (DC/Vertigo); Alex Ross, *Marvels* (Marvel); Dave Sim and Gerhard, *Cerebus* (Aardvark-Vanaheim)

BEST EDITOR: Karen Berger, *The Sandman, Death: The High Cost of Living* (DC/Vertigo), Mike Carlin, Superman titles (DC); Diana Schutz, *Batman/Grendel, Grendel Tales, American Splendor, The 1001 Nights of Bacchus, The Jam* (Dark Horse)

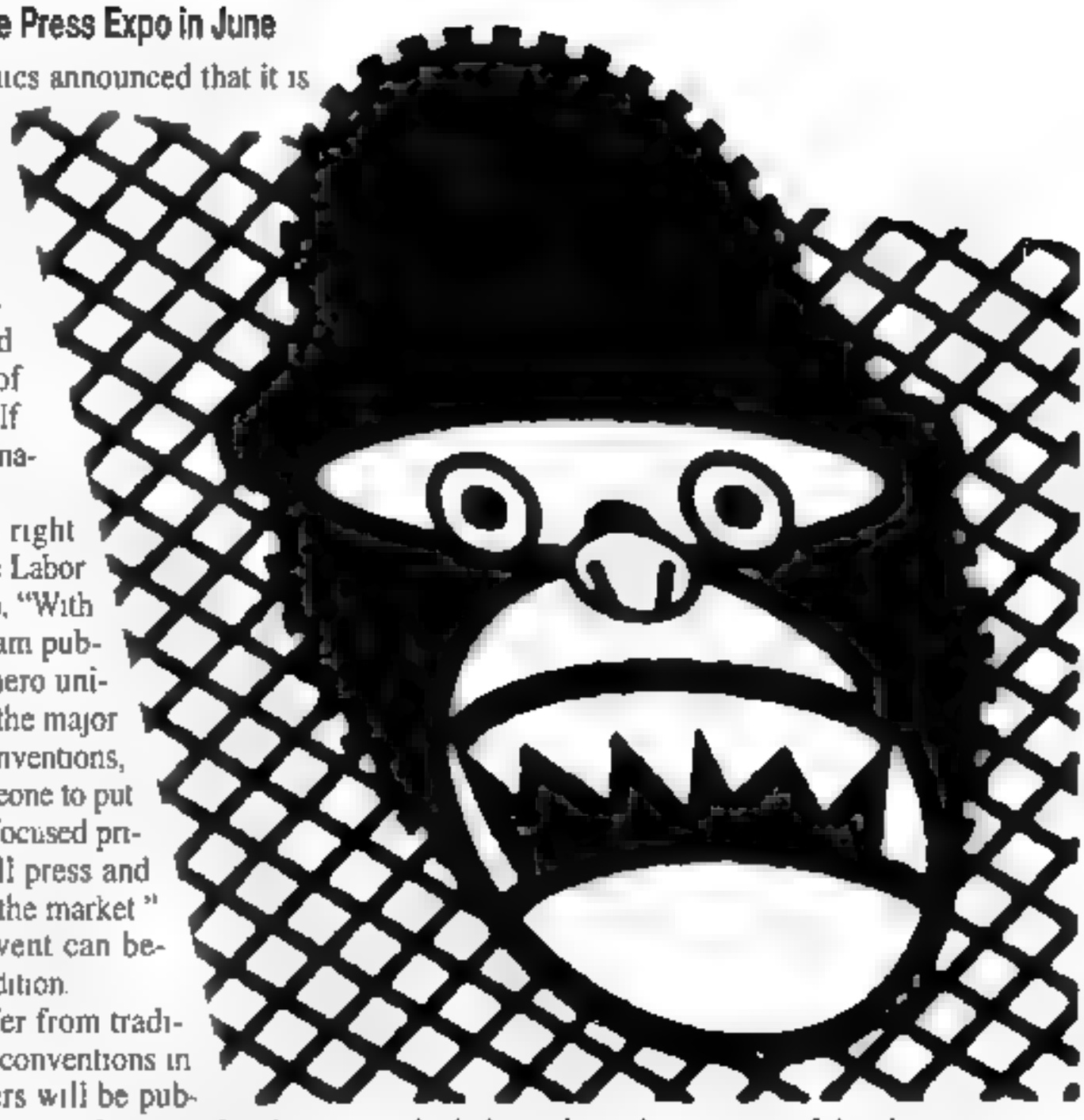
BEST COMICS-RELATED BOOK: *Comic Book Rebels*, by Steve Bissette (Donald I. Fine, Inc.); *Michael Wm. Kaluta Sketchbook*, by Michael Kaluta (Kitchen Sink); *Understanding Comics*, by Scott McCloud (Kitchen Sink)

BEST COMICS-RELATED ITEM: Death statue, by Randy Bowen (DC), Death watch, design by Chris Bachalo (DC); *Oddball Comics* card set #1, by Scott Shaw! (Kitchen Sink); Superman statue, by Randy Bowen (DC)

BEST PUBLICATION DESIGN: *The Best of Drawn & Quarterly* (Drawn & Quarterly), *Death. The High Cost of Living* (hardcover), designed by Dave McKean (DC/Vertigo); *Love and Rockets X*, designed by Dale Yarger (Fantagraphics); *Marvels*, designed by Comicraft (Marvel); *Rubber Blanket*, designed by David Mazzucchelli and Richmond Lewis (Rubber Blanket Press)

HALL OF FAME: Jack Cole; Jack Davis; Steve Ditko; Al Feldstein; Gardner Fox; Frank Frazetta; Stan Lee; Joe Simon; John Stanley ER

1st Alternative Press Expo in June

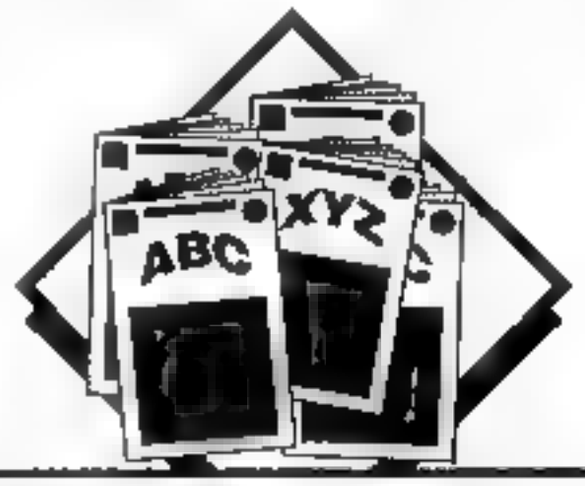


Slave Labor Graphics announced that it is sponsoring the first Alternative Press Expo (A.P.E.). A.P.E. '94 will be held on Sat., June 4 at the San Jose Civic Auditorium and will be an exhibit of small publishers, self publishers and alternative cartoonists.

"The time was right for this," said Slave Labor publisher Dan Vado. "With all of the mainstream publishers and super-hero universes dominating the major trade shows and conventions, it was time for someone to put something on that focused primarily on the small press and alternative side of the market." Vado hopes the event can become an annual tradition.

A.P.E. will differ from traditional comic book conventions in that the only dealers will be publishers and cartoonists, with no retailers being permitted. The show will differ from a traditional trade show, however, in that it will be open to the general public.

The initial guest list for A.P.E. '94 includes Jeff Smith, Nina Paley, Lloyd Dangle, Mario Hernandez, Shannon Wheeler, and self-publishing guru Dave Sim, with more names to be announced. Admission to the event will be $4 to the general public and will run from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Contact Dan Vado at 1-800-866-8929 for more information.



MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

BIG Entertainment Buys Book Publisher

BIG Entertainment, Inc. has announced that an agreement in principle has been signed to purchase a 51 percent controlling interest in publishing and book packaging business of Tomorrow, Inc. and Dr. Martin H. Greenberg. Tomorrow, Inc. is owned by Greenberg, a director of BIG Entertainment. The purchase price is $1.6 million, payable in an undisclosed combination of cash and shares of Common Stock of BIG Entertainment, a publicly held company.

Tomorrow, Inc. creates book projects and executes them for publishers. The publishing and book packaging business includes royalties and interests in publishing rights to over 700 books, of which 560 have been published, with the balance in various stages of development. Also included in the transaction is a 25.1 percent ownership interest in *Mystery Scene Magazine*, a mystery genre journal.

Greenberg will retain a 49 percent interest in Tomorrow, Inc. and will continue to manage the business as Chief Executive Officer. He will also remain a co-publisher of *Mystery Scene Magazine*. In addition, Greenberg will be working with BIG to package BIG's comic book characters and storylines into novelizations and anthologies.

Greenberg said that "this new relationship is intended to interrelate my contacts with best selling authors and publishers with BIG's contacts in the entertainment field, so as to package works ... in various media formats such as traditional books, comic books, video games and multimedia CD-Roms."

Bone & Disney

The magazine *Disney Adventures*, which has been reprinting Jeff Smith's *Bone* in full color, will feature an all-new *Bone* eight-page story in its August issue. The story is painted by Tom Luth. "May the Force Be With You" will take place just following the events in *Bone* #1. The eight-pager will be reprinted in black-and-white in a future Cartoon Books *Bone* trade paperback collection.

A Bone *panel to appear in* Disney Adventures, *by Jeff Smith.*

A Captain Marvel-Inspired Murder?

The April 3 edition of the English tabloid *News of the World* (England's counterpart to the *National Enquirer*) reports that a man accused of stabbing a 12-year old schoolgirl to death in her classroom was inspired by Marvel's "violent" *Captain Marvel* comic book series.

"Loner" Stephen Wilkinson was reportedly so enthralled with the scenes of death and mayhem in *Captain Marvel* that he donned a mask and burst into Hall Garth school in Middlesbrough, England on March 27 and killed one girl and injured two others.

"We all read them," childhood friend Stephen Nolan was quoted as saying, "but he took it much further. He made up his own stories with all the Marvel heroes. He seemed totally normal. The only thing different about him was he spent so much time with his comics. He was obsessed with violent comics like *Captain Marvel*."

"We enjoyed the *Captain Marvel* comics, with all their violent images. But it never occurred to me as being unusual," Wilkinson's boyhood best friend, Andy Smelt, was quoted as saying.

The News of the World reports that Wilkinson was in custody and charged with first-degree murder and two counts of attempted murder. The article does not elaborate further on specifics such as the "mask" that Wilkinson was said to have been wearing or how they concluded that *Captain Marvel* specifically inspired the murder.

Classics Int. Announces New Position

Gary Colabuono, executive vice president of Classics International Entertainment, Inc. (CIEI), has announced that Andrea Goldberg has joined the company as manager of retail business development, effective April 27.

Goldberg, formerly Marvel's midwest field representative, worked with retailers on developing marketing and promotional strategies throughout a 12 state area. She will put her experience to similar use at CIEI.

CIEI is the parent company of Moondog's and Dream Factory, Inc., two comic book/pop culture chains, and First Classics, Inc., publisher of *Classics Illustrated*. CIEI is a publicly traded on the small cap market of the NASDAQ stock market under the symbol CIEI.

3rd Annual Comic Arts Conference

The Third Annual Comic Arts Conference (CAC) will be held in conjunction with the Chicago ComiCon on July 2 at the Radisson Suites O'Hare, directly across the street from the Convention Center where ComiCon will be held. CAC attempts to build bridges between academia and the comic book industry by bringing together scholars and professionals for serious investigations of topics ranging over the world of comics. Founded in 1992 by communications professor Randy Duncan and American studies graduate student Peter M. Coogan, the CAC has scheduled topics this year that include superheroes, gay and lesbian comic strips, "mature" comic books, Nina Paley, the Canada Jack Fan Club, Walt Kelly's editorial cartoons, and comics scholarship, among others. The organizers are currently recruiting professionals to serve as respondents. Scott McCloud (*Understanding Comics*) is amongst those scheduled thus far to participate.

Dream Factory For Her Brings Pop CultureTo Women

Geoffrey Talbot, president and CEO of Classics International Entertainment, Inc. (CIEI), announced that his company will launch "Dream Factory For Her," a popular culture and comic book retail store specifically targeting women.

The store will reportedly carry a wide variety of comic book and pop culture merchandise, including romance novels, fantasy crystal art objects, apparel, specialized lines of games, and other related items. Dream Factory For Her stores will be designed to appeal to professional women, ranging in age from 17 to 35 years old. Dream Factory, Inc. President Lori Raub estimates that the company will have at least six of the stores up and running by the end of 1994. The stores, slated for Connecticut, Illinois, and Ohio, will be located in "high profile" malls where CIEI already owns stores

In order to establish and maintain an independent identity for Dream Factory For Her, CIEI has changed the name of its 12 existing "Dream Factory" stores to "Moondog's". The company currently owns 17 comic book stores in Connecticut, New York, Ohio and Illinois that have operated under the names "Moondog's" and "Dream Factory." The name change began April 28.

Jim Davis Buys Garfield Copyright

United Media, a subsidiary of the E.W. Scripps Company, has reached an agreement to sell the copyright, syndication, and licensing rights for Garfield to Paws, Inc., the company owned by Garfield creator Jim Davis.

The agreement is subject to the negotiations and execution of a definitive purchase agreement and to other customary conditions. The parties expect to complete the transaction by May 31, 1994. Terms were not disclosed. The sale negotiation arose in anticipation of the expiration of Jim Davis' contract with United Media, originally scheduled to expire this spring.

United Media launched the Garfield comic strip in 1978, and it has since become one of the world's most widely syndicated strips as well as one of the most successful licensed properties in merchandising history. "It's been a great 16 years with United Media," said Davis. Davis is the president of Paws, Inc., a privately held company in Albany, Ind.

Kirby Tribute Benefit Comic

"King"— Kirby is Not Gone! is a 32-page tribute comic book dedicated to Jack Kirby, who passed away in February. 38 creators, including writers, artists and letterers from Texas and the Southwest, have donated one-page tributes to Kirby's memory and talent. Organized by Mark Stokes and Richard Dominguez, all profits will be donated to the Harvey Awards, which features the Jack Kirby Hall of Fame Award. Amongst the contributors for the $3

Kirby tribute by Don Punchatz for "King"

book are Shannon Wheeler, Kerry Gammill, Ben Dunn, J. Michael McCarthy, and J. David Spurlock.

Joe Montana Suit Settled

A settlement has been reached in a suit filed by NFL quarterback Joe Montana against Revolutionary Comics, Personality Comics, Diamond Distributors, Capital City Distribution, and several retail comic book outlets for the production, distribution and selling of a number of unauthorized comic book biographies. Person-

ality Comics and Revolutionary Comics both published books about Montana as well as several trading cards which served as a promotional giveaway within the comics. Montana

Joe Montana sued over the use of his likeness in comics such as this one from Revolutionary Comics

sued over the use of his likeness within the comic books and on the trading cards.

According to Diamond attorney John Llewellyn Hone, who could only speak peripherally about the case because of a non-disclosure clause initiated by Montana in the settlement, Diamond had demurred (a legal term saying that the plaintiff hasn't stated the cause of action either in law or in fact upon which relief can be granted) successfully against two of Montana's complaints, and was in the process of demurring against a third complaint when an out-of-court settlement was reached. Hone said that Diamond had spearheaded the defense and eventual resolution of the dispute on behalf of Revolutionary and Personality, both of which have been strapped with heavy debt of late [see *TCJ* "Newswatch" #164], in an effort to protect the rights of all parties.

New Eros Comics Editor

Eros Comics, the adults-only imprint of Fantagraphics Books, has named a new editor according to co-Publisher Kim Thompson. Jeremy Pinkham, who assumed the position following a stint as the production manager on comics for Fantagraphics, replaces the departing Tom Verre.

"I want to turn Eros into a high-powered machine for delivering the most obscene works imaginable to as wide a spectrum of comics readers — internationally! I'm especially looking for hot grrrls who want to piss people off and make us money at the same time," Pinkham said of his new position.

NBM Launches New "ComicsLit" Imprint

NBM publishing has announced the formation of a new imprint devoted to quality graphic novels. The imprint is being launched with the July release of a European graphic novel by Spanish artist Miguelanxo Prado called *Streak of Chalk*. A number of existing titles in the NBM catalog will be reunited under this new imprint. *ComicsTrips* by Peter Kuper, *Roach Killer* by Tardi, *The Magician's Wife* by Charyn & Boucq, *Heartthrobs* by Max Cabanes, and the *Corto Maltese* series among others.

Post Bros. Moves to ÆON

Matt Howarth's comic book *Those Annoying Post Bros.* is moving from Vortex to ÆON with issue #39, according to Publisher Edd Vick. The book will continue to be published on a bi-monthly schedule. Howarth has announced that he is also planning to do *Post Bros.* trade paperback collections under the ÆON imprint, which would be the first collections of the series in its ten-year history.

Post Bros. began as a serial in *Heavy Metal* magazine in the early '80s and became a series with Vortex in 1985. Issue #39 will be released early this summer, with the trade paperbacks appearing later this year.

Help Sought in Missing Shanower Art

Eric Shanower is asking for assistance in locating original art that was lost in New Haven, Conn., on Mar. 28 of this year. The missing art is for the story *An Accidental Death*, which originally appeared in *Dark Horse Presents* #s 65-67, and was reprinted in 1993 by Fantagraphics. The missing art includes:

- 31 original black-and-white comic book pages, approximately 11 1/2" by 17 1/2"
- One painting reproduced as the front cover of *Dark Horse Presents* #65, approximately 15" by 20"
- One painting reproduced as the back cover of Fantagraphics' *An Accidental Death*, approximately 15" by 20"
- One blueline painting reproduced as the front cover of *An Accidental Death*, approximately 10" by 13"

Shanower is also missing a story he did titled "Pizzaface," which appeared in *Gay Comics* #17. The missing art (the time and place "Pizzaface" was lost is unknown) includes:

- Five original black-and-white comic book pages, approximately 11 1/2" by 17 1/2"
- One original black-and-white comic book cover, approximately 11 1/2" by 17 1/2"

If anyone has any information regarding the whereabouts of the artwork in question, contact Shanower at (201) 743-4749 or (415) 883-0622.

Sotheby's Sponsors Arts Forum

Conversations at Sotheby's is a new series of discussions among celebrated figures in the arts and public life, and began on March 8 with Jules Feiffer and Maurice Sendak talking, laughing and reminiscing about creativity, poverty and strict parents. Cheryl Henson, daughter of *Muppets*-creator Jim Henson, moderated the discussion.

The discussions are part of Sotheby's 250th anniversary celebration, designed to explore the creative process in various fields of endeavor. Jules Feiffer, Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and author, and Maurice Sendak, one of the leading visionaries in children's literature, kicked off the series with "Drawing Conclusions," which also featured an exhibition of children's art by Sendak, Feiffer and others.

On April 4th, the second evening of *Conversations* will feature historian and writer Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and novelist E.L. Doctorow in "History and the Imagination," with journalist John Chancellor as host. The third in the series will occur on May 2, and is titled "The Devil's Playground," featuring painter Eric Fischl and historian Elaine Pagels with writer and architectural historian Brendan Gill as host.

The hour long discussions will be held monthly through October, with proceeds benefiting the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House.

Valiant Names New Editors

Effective April 16, Tony Bedard has been named the Executive Editor of Valiant Comics, according to a press release from the publisher, Voyager Communications Inc. Formerly an editor for Valiant, Bedard replaces Kevin Van Hook, who is leaving to pursue a career as a Hollywood screenwriter. Bedard will be the editorial department's second-in-command to Editor-in-Chief Bob Layton.

Jeff Gomez has joined Valiant as Assistant Editor. Gomez comes to Valiant from the comic book/role playing fanzine *Gateways*, of which he was the publisher. Before that, he served as the marketing director of Palladium Books for a year, where he also wrote and edited for the company.

Xeric Foundation Announces Grants

The Xeric Foundation has announced its most recent grant recipients. A total of $15,548 was awarded to four comic book creators. The artists receiving grants are as follows:

- Tom Hart of Seattle, Wash. — *Hutch Owen's Working Hard*
- Garret Izumi of Fremont, Calif. — *Strip Down*
- Scott Getchell of Cambridge, Mass. — *Richie Kill'd My Toads*
- Stephen Townsend of Los Angeles, Calif. — *The Hood: A Change From Within*

Established by Peter Laird, co-creator of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, the Northampton, Mass.-based foundation offers financial assistance to self-publishing comic book creators nationwide and qualified charitable and non-profit organizations in western Massachusetts.

The current grants cover the six-month period beginning Aug. 1, 1993 and ending Jan. 31, 1994. The next deadline and review dates are July 31, 1994 and Sept. 1, 1994. The Foundation has awarded in excess of $170,000 since Sept. 1992. ER

Kartoon Fever

COMICS!

PRINTS AND TEE-SHIRTS

KARTOONO

COME ON DOWN TO FOUR COLOR IMAGES INC. (THE GALLERY OF COMIC ART!) AT 524 BROADWAY- (SUITE 602) NEW YORK N.Y. 10012 (212) 431-4234.

JUNE 2, THROUGH JULY 30, 1994!

IT'S FUN!

DRAWINGS!

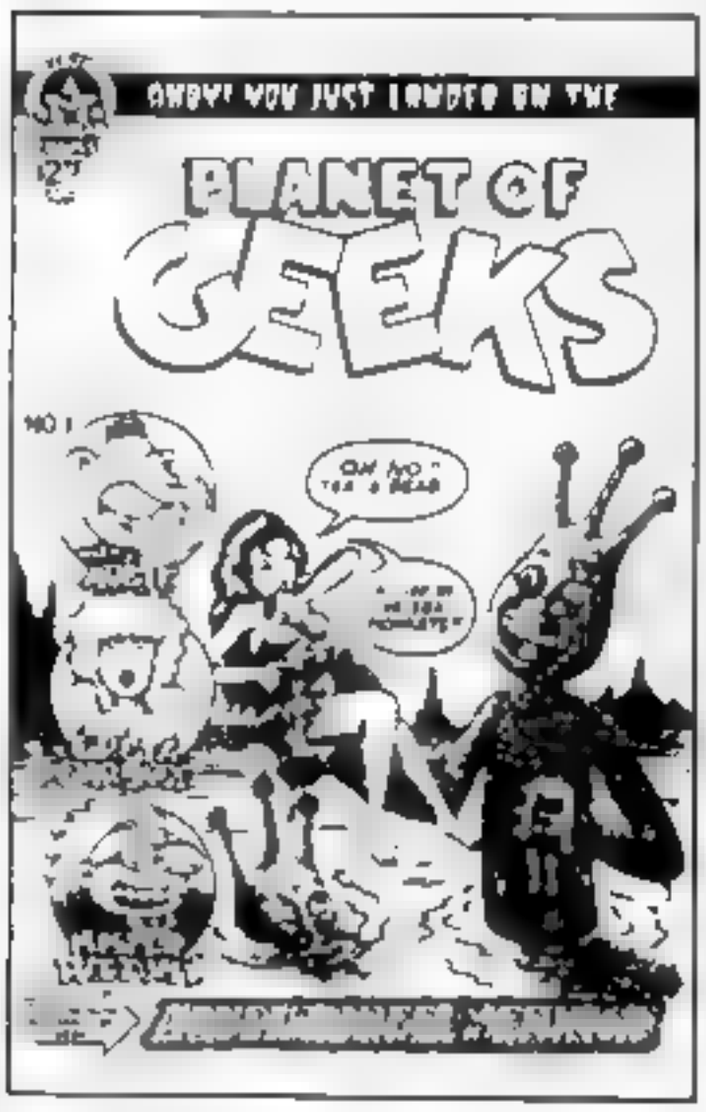
CARTOON ART BY KIM DEITCH! AND SIMON DEITCH!

CELS!

THE WALL ST. JOURNAL REFERS TO ANIMATION ART AS THE NUMBER ONE COLLECTIBLE, IN TERMS OF INVESTMENT POTENTIAL, IN AMERICA TODAY!

NEW COMICS NEWS

Something is morally dead at the 469th in *The Desert Peach* #2! by **DONNA BARR** (Æon)... Classic stories by **RAY BRADBURY** are adapted in the *Ray Bradbury Special. Tales of Horror* by **ANTHONY WILLIAMS** and **WALLY WOOD**, among others (Topps)... *Big Bang* is a new book that promises to duplicate the look and feel of the golden age, from **GARY CARLSON** and Caliber Press... **AL COLUMBIA** begins the ambitious *Biological Show* #1, featuring Grinding Larry racing Satanic treadmills of grand-patricidal dreams (Starhead). **DAVID COLLIER** pays tribute to EC Comics in the long-awaited third issue of *Collier's* (Fantagraphics)... Twisted, organic and perverse is the only way to describe **DAVE COOPER**'s *Pressed Tongue* #2, just the thing for jaded comix fans (Fantagraphics) .. Find out why teenage girls and urban hipsters are digging *Dangle* by **LLOYD DANGLE** with #3 (Drawn & Quarterly) .. **R.L. CRABB** is the king of *Planet of Geeks*, a new humor comic from Starhead... **GUY DAVIS** is responsible for the *Baker Street Sketchbook* from Caliber...*White Like She* promises to be the most anti-P.C. book around, join **BOB FINGERMAN** and Dark Horse Comics to see if they can make it as offensive as they claim... A darker twist on the company-crossover trend comes from Boneyard and London Night Studios with a story mixing two psychopaths in *Razor/ Dark Angel. The Final Nail* by **HART D. FISHER** and **DEV MADAN**.. **ROBERTA GREGORY** self-publishes the second issue of her thinking-person's adult book *Artistic Licentiousness* (Comix Bitch)... *Tales From the Heart* continues the story of a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa with #11, by **CINDY GOFF** and **RAFAEL NIEVES** (Slave Labor).. **DAVID GREENBERGER** and friends dish up *Duplex Planet* #8 (Fantagraphics)... A peculiar story of dark fantasy, *Poison Elves* #15 is **DREW HAYES**'s fantasy for people who detest elves, fairies and anything cute (Mulehide Press)... *Guttersnipe* #1 is the new comic from snake-eyed **GLENN HEAD** (Fantagraphics)... For better or worse — okay, for worse — *Judge Dredd* comes to the U.S. with all new stories from DC by **ANDREW HELFER** and **MIKE AVON OEMING**... **SAM HART** brings his *Eyebeam* strip to Adhesive Comics for a new three-issue series. **MARK KALESNIKO** continues his stories of a dog-headed cartoonist with *Alex* #3 (Fantagraphics)... **MICHAEL WM. KALUTA** adapts this summer's most-likely-to-be-vapid-and-make-tons-of-money movie, *The Shadow* (Dark Horse)... *Bughouse* is a new book by **STEVE LAFLER** featuring a cast of insects, some bug juice, and a saxophonist hero (Cat-Head Comics)... More oddball, off beat humor comes your way with *Zoot* #6 by **ROGER** and **ANDREW LANGRIDGE** (Fantagraphics)... *Archie Meets The Punisher* (Archie/Marvel) may well turn out to be the worst comic of the decade, not an easy thing to aspire to. By **BATTON LASH, JOHN BUSCEMA** and **GOLDBERG** .. *True Swamp* by **JON LEWIS** won a Xeric Foundation grant and yet Diamond would not distribute it. To find out why, pick up the second issue and learn about life in the swamp (Peristalic Press) .. *Drama* is a one-shot by **JOSEPH MICHAEL LINSNER** featuring stories of psychological horror and twisted religious undertones (Sirius)... **FRANK MILLER** and **DAVE GIBBONS** continue their off-kilter future history of a young woman in an America on the brink, with *Martha Washington Goes To War* (Dark Horse)... The fourth volume of **HAYAO MIYAZAKI**'s Japanese language ecological science fiction story *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind* is being translated by Viz... *The Violator* Yes, it's an Image book, yes it is drawn by fanboy artist **GARY SEARS** and yes it does have Spawn in it. And it's all written by **ALAN MOORE**... **TERRANCE P. MURPHY** and **KENT MYERS** take *Detroit! Murder City Comics* to Slave Labor with issue #4... **DARREN RAVE** and **SEAN SCOFFIELD** are responsible for *Human Remains*, a philosophical one-shot from the folks at Black Eye... Columnist **DAN SAVAGE**, notorious in Seattle for his ultra-hip advice column in *The Stranger*, succumbs to the lure of the comics medium and delivers *Savage Love*, with help from **JAMES STURM, ELLEN FORNEY**, and others (Bear Bones Press)... **WALTER SIMONSON** returns to his creator-owned property *Star Slammers*, after 12 years (Malibu/Bravura)... **FIONA SMYTH** is the head star of this month's Starhead Monthly Mini-Comic, titled *Perkyssimo... Zombie Boy Rides Again* #1 by **MARK STOKES** also features artwork by **GILBERT HERNANDEZ, KYLE BAKER, MOEBIUS**, and **BEN EDLUND** (Timbuktu Graphics)... The darkly humorous story of the fate of old cereal pitch men reaches its latest chapter with **JAMES STURM**'s *The Cereal Killings* #6 (Fantagraphics)... *Way Out Strips* #2, by **CAROL SWAIN**, speaks for itself (Fantagraphics)... Having what is undoubtedly the longest name of any book this month, *Aeon Focus: Yet Another Colin Upton's Other Even Bigger Than Slightly Smaller That Got Bigger Big Thing*, features a mix of fiction and auto-biography by **COLIN UPTON** (Æon) **MARTIN WAGNER** reaches the tenth chapter of "Snowblind, Exorcism" in *Hepcats* #12 (Double Diamond)... We have no idea what to expect from *Rocky Marijuana Seed Meets The Old Coot* #2, but the name warrants mention. From **ROCKY WALTERS** and **MITCH CONNER** (Concept Comics).. Following up his amazing first issue, **CHRIS WARE** brings the comic world the second issue of *Acme Novelty Library* (Fantagraphics)... *Omaha The Cat Dancer* moves to Fantagraphics and starts over with Volume Two, #1 **REED WALLER** and **KATE WORLEY**'s story remains as excellent as ever... **MARK WHEATLEY** starts his new series *Radical Dreamer* (Blackball) with a zero issue; the story revolves around a man who can control his dreams and his foes who want to control the dreams of others... *JIM* #3 (Fantagraphics) presents another batch of strange, dream-like stories from the mind of **JIM WOODRING** .



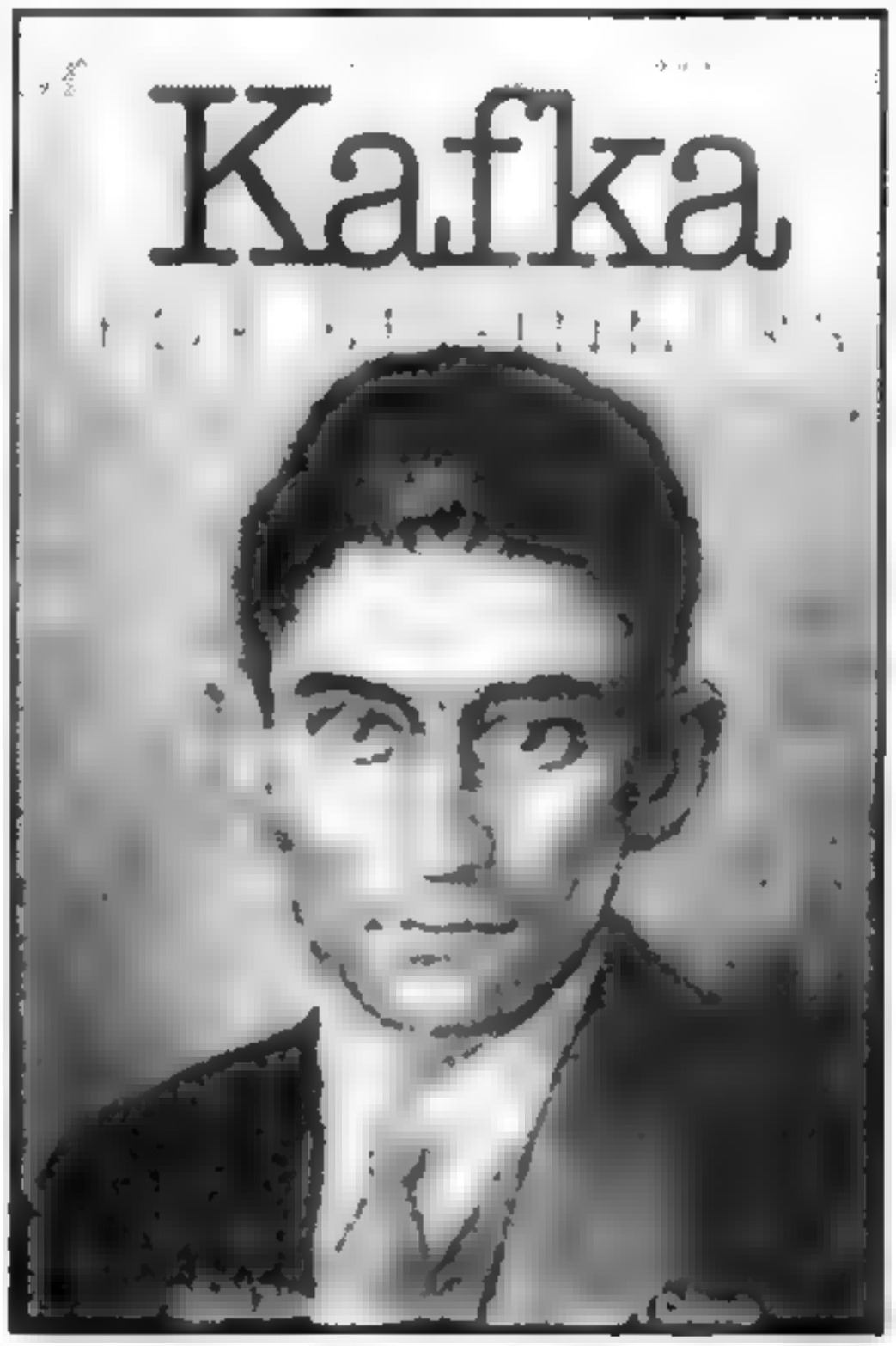
Anthologies

An Omaha crossover by **REED WALLER** and **KATE WORLEY** kicks off *Gay Comics* #22 (Gay Comics), with the rest of the issue also devoted to (not so?) funny animals by a variety of artists... Works by **ALAN MOORE** and **NEIL GAIMAN**, among others, are adapted in *Negative Burn* #11 (Caliber)... Sex stories for literate members of both sexes is the theme of *Real Girl* #7, the special "flip book" issue (Fantagraphics)... Black Eye brings forth the second issue of *Sputnik* and features a lead story by novelist **DANIEL RICHLER** and **DOMINIC BUGATTO**... *Twisted Sisters Comics* #2 brings together work by some of the best female cartoonists in the comic business including **CAROL LAY** and **DIANE NOOMIN** (Kitchen Sink) *Tales From The Edge* #4 continues to feature the stunning artwork of **BARRON STORY** and others (Vanguard Comics)... *Blazing Combat* reprints classic Warren Publishing war comics by **FRANK FRAZETTA, AL WILLIAMSON, REED CRANDALL**, and others (Apple)... *Buzzard* #11 features such crazies as **STEVE LAFLER, J.R.WILLIAMS, MARIO HERNANDEZ**, and **R.L. CRABB**, among others (Cat-Head). .

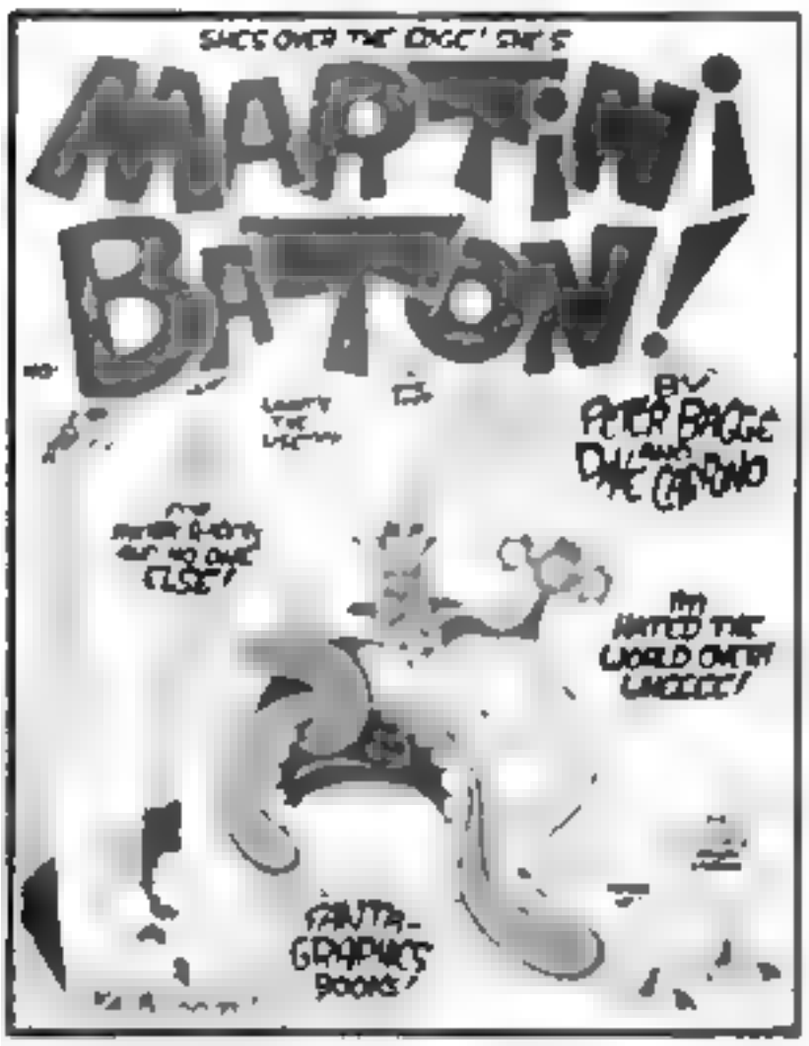
Artwork from Buzzard *#11 by Mario Hernandez*

Graphic Novels

The New Frontier presents an absurd future as it would have been seen from the '50s, by **MICHAEL CHERKAS** and **JOHN SABLIC** (NBM)... If you buy one comic this month, it should probably be *Kafka for Beginners*, with 176 pages of **ROBERT CRUMB** as you've never seen him before (Kitchen Sink Press) **JEREMY EATON**'s *Island of Dr Moral* is 64-page Sleepyhead tale (Fantagraphics) Adapted from the crime noir book of the same name, *City of Glass* is the first in the Neon Lit series of graphic albums The adaptation is courtesy of **PAUL KARASIK** and **DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI** (Avon Books)... **JEFF JONES** sees a collection of mostly previously unpublished paintings in print for the first time in *Age of Innocence* (Underwood) **JASON LUTES** presents the first of his two-part novel *Jar of Fools* which deals with a magician in crisis (Penny Dreadful Press) The praised *From Hell* series from the team of **ALAN MOORE** and **EDDIE CAMPBELL** reaches its fifth volume in this highly detailed study of Victorian England and Jack the Ripper (Kitchen Sink) In the second volume of **R. CRAIG RUSSELL**'s *Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, he adapts two of Wilde's classic tales, enjoyable for both children and adults (NBM) **JOHN WAGNER** and **ARTHUR RANSOM** originally did the story *Button Man: The Killing Game* for *2000 A.D.* where it won the 1993 U.K. Comic Award for Most Popular Strip, but now Kitchen Sink brings it to the U.S....



Reprints



Martini Baton #1 reprints the entire Martini saga originally seen in *Weirdo*, by **PETER BAGGE** and **DAVE CARRINO** (Fantagraphics)... Early stories of **DONNA BARR**'s gay, non-violent German officer during WW2 continue with *The Desert Peach: Baby Games* (Æon), in which The Peach deals with women and the birth of his son... The newest *Li'l Abner* collection by **AL CAPP**, Vol. 19, is due from Kitchen Sink Press... **DAN CLOWES** gets the deluxe, limited-edition treatment with the 240-page, signed hardcover collection *The Manly Worlds of Lloyd Llewelyn*, a compendium of every single LL story ever released Limited to 2000 copies (Fantagraphics) Kitchen Sink continues its anniversary celebration with the reprinting of the underground classic *Mondo Snarfo*, with work by **CRUMB**, **DEITCH**, **SPIEGELMAN**, **GRIFFITH**, and more Adult readers who missed them the first time around can pick up *Xxxenophile: The Big Book of Fun* and get all of **PHIL FOGLIO**'s stories of sex, sex and bad jokes (Pulliard Press)... Classic strips from the pen of **HAL FOSTER** are available again in *Prince Valiant Vol. 21: Prisoner of Khan* (Fantagraphics) The newest book in the *Sandman* series of collected volumes is "Brief Lives" by **NEIL GAIMAN**, now available in hardcover (DC/Vertigo) **ROBERTA GREGORY**'s first *Naughty Bits* collection is *A Bitch is Born*, featuring new work as well (Fantagraphics) Pinhead fans can look forward to a new, improved version of *Are We Having Fun Yet?*, an essential collection of Zippy by **BILL GRIFFITH** (Fantagraphics) Hot off the heels of his definitive *Journal* interview, NBM is releasing the seventh volume of **BURNE HOGARTH**'s classic *Tarzan* newspaper strip Volume eight of **DAVE SIM**'s Cerebus "phone book" collections, *Women* (Aardvark-Vanaheim), reprints the first book of the current storyline *The Complete Bone Adventures Vol. 2* will not be out until the end of July but we want to tell you about it now so you won't miss this great book by **JEFF SMITH** (Cartoon Books)... The first five issues of **JOE SACCO**'s powerful comic are collected in *Palestine Book One: A Nation Occupied* (Fantagraphics)...

Other Stuff

Own a Bone. Yes, now you can own a Bone of your very own (no jokes) with the *Bone* Limited Edition Cold-Cast Figurine based off the popular comic by **JEFF SMITH** (Dark Horse) . From the pages of *Mangajin* magazine comes *Mangajin's Basic Japanese Through Comics*. A work teaching Japanese language and culture through comics (Weatherhill)... **ALAN MOORE**'s complete scripts and production notes from his Eisner award-winning series *From Hell*, complete with new art by **EDDIE CAMPBELL**, are being released by Borderlands Press... Kitchen Sink is releasing a gorgeous Kustom Kulture-inspired "Live Skull" T-shirt by **CHARLES BURNS** as well as a T Shirt featuring a classic **ROBERT CRUMB** *Zap Comix* #0 image... All of you bachelor fanboy fast food-eatin' studs out there might want to get *Ren & Stimpy's Oh Joy of Cooking*, featuring recipes for such appetizing delicacies like 'Ren's Dirt Dogs' and more (Putnam)

New Zealand Customs Seize Comics

Peter David and George Perez's Sachs & Violens *is under fire from the New Zealand Indecent Publications Tribunal*

From September to December of 1993, New Zealand Customs officials seized a number of comic titles for review from one Wellington importer, Visual Media Services, Ltd. The titles included *Asylum* #1, *Dirty Plotte* #s 1 & 7 (Drawn & Quarterly), *Hothead Paisan, Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist* #1, *Marshal Law: Blood, Sweat and Fears* and *Marshal Law. Night of the Living Dead HC* (Dark Horse), *Sachs and Violence* #1, *Lève ta jambe, mon poisson est mort* (Drawn & Quarterly), *Vixen Wars*, *Flowers on the Razorwire*, *Bad Blood*, and *Scream Queen Illustrated*, vol. 1, #1.

In late February of 1994, most of these titles were returned without the need for a decision from the Indecent Publications Tribunal by Customs officials.

Sachs & Violens #1 and *Lève ta jambe* were kept by Customs and appeared before the Indecent Publications Tribunal on March 15, 1994. A decision on these titles is pending, but from past experience will take up to six months to be given.

Customs also seized copies of *Terminal Drift*, books two and three, and *Hard Looks* #10 (Dark Horse), but gave them back to the retailer after several weeks of review. Several copies of *Asylum* #1 and *Evil Ernie* were seized by Customs, the retailer neglected to reply in the allotted time, and the comics were destroyed by law without further notice.

SEIZED COMICS STILL AVAILABLE ELSEWHERE

While *Sachs and Violens* #1 and *Lève ta jambe* were awaiting a hearing by the Tribunal in Wellington on the 15th of March, they were freely available from at least one store elsewhere in the country. On the 10th of March,

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

TCJ's correspondent rang the Auckland store Mark One and was informed by the owner that both titles were on sale, and had been for the past few months. He thanked me for bringing their current status to his attention and told me he would remove them from sale, as he didn't want any trouble. When I asked a local Customs official about this, he explained that Wellington and Auckland Customs do not perform the same tasks, and have no intercommunication regarding comic book publications. If the titles were to be found indecent, then any store still stocking them could be prosecuted, as could any member of the public who owned a copy bought from such stores. The current law, he said, places the onus on the retailer and the individual to be aware of the banned titles. A second customs official, from Head Office, contradicted the above comments, saying that titles should be stopped nationwide, or, at the very least, retailers asked to put a hold on the items until futher notice. She also said that under the current law an individual can only be prosecuted for indecent titles they have knowingly imported, and so any items that have slipped through Customs, bought in good faith, will only be seized and destroyed.

She also claimed that Auckland Customs were examining and stopping the import of any comic titles, but then found that the last title they had sent to the tribunal was "quite some time ago." In the future, she said, there would be more communication and consistency between the departments regarding comic titles.

A letter dated the 8th of March which Customs official Mike Wotherspoon sent to Visual Media Services in Wellington explained that the titles *Sachs and Violens* and *Lève ta Jambe* were seized by Customs not because they think they should be declared indecent, but because they feel these titles should have an age restriction for sale to persons 18 years and over. This is their recommendation to the Tribunal, and all they are seeking. Such a process can take many months, indeed anything up to a year, from time of seizure to final decision from the Tribunal and return of the goods to the store. In the meantime the goods must still be paid for by the retailer, and have been available for several months elsewhere in the country on mail order.

While the Customs official I spoke with admitted that the way Wellington Customs operated was financially disadvantaging the Wellington-based comic shop, Customs, he said, were only doing their job as best as they could see fit, given the ambiguous act, and the contradictory nature of previous decisions from the Indecent Publications Tribunal.

THE LEGAL SITUATION

The current law that applies to comic books in New Zealand refers to "picture story books," and as such treats them as children's literature. The Act, which came into force in 1963, states

that if "... the Tribunal decides that any picture-story book likely to be read by children is indecent in the hands of children under a specified age that picture-story book shall be deemed to be indecent in the hands of all persons." There are several loopholes in the Act; terms such as "children," and "likely to be read by children" are not defined, and each Tribunal has struggled to come to grips with these definitions and just how to apply them to the material before them.

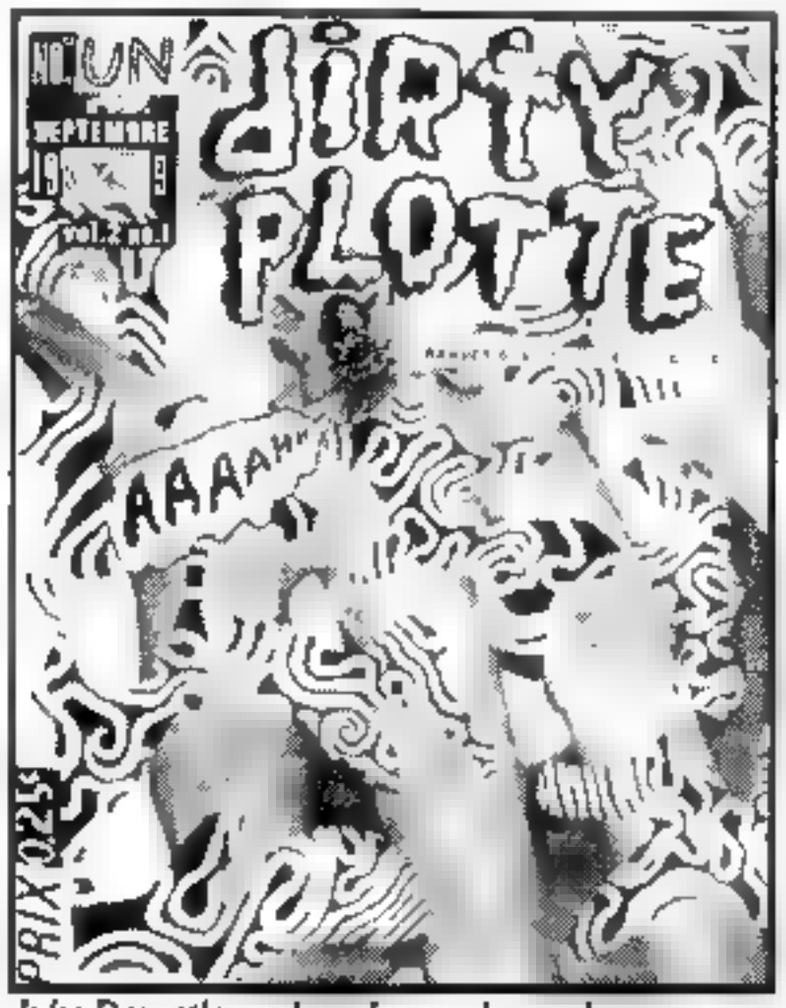
This has led to confusion as to what sort of material is likely to be okay to import.

As an example, in February of this year, Customs seized *The Collected Omaha*, vol. 5. This was surprising, as previous issues and collections of *Omaha* have been pronounced "not indecent" with no age restriction by the Indecent Publications Tribunal

In 1991 a decision on *The Collected Omaha*, vols. 1 and 2 and *Omaha the Cat Dancer* #7-10 declared them all not indecent. The Tribunal decision stated nothing about whether the books were likely to be read by children, just that the books had "intelligent, reasoned social commentary,... social and artistic ment,... educative rather than corrupting influence,... [and] honest portrayals of human relationships." That meant "these books would not be injurious to the public good." In the same hearings, however, *The Erotic Art of Reed Waller*, a collection of Omaha sketches, was declared unconditionally indecent, and subsequently destroyed by Customs The decision stated, "The characters are animals in human form which are very well drawn and well-defined. The illustrations are simple line drawings which concentrate on Omaha's sexual activity. There is no doubt that children would be attracted to this publication ."

The conflicting nature of such decisions regarding books which, to those of us in the comics industry, are very similar in artistic content and style, makes it impossible to translate the Tribunal's past decisions into guidelines of what can be imported in the future.

It is interesting to note that *Drawn & Quarterly* and *Dirty Plotte* have all been sold



Julie Doucet's work is also pending a decision.

across the country, and *Lève ta jambe* is reprinted work mainly from those two sources. However, this does not automatically mean the Tribunal will decide in favour of the title. In past, the collected *Ranxerox* was declared indecent in this country, yet the individual issues of *Heavy Metal* (which contained the complete story in serial form) were freely available, and have never appeared before the Tribunal.

The 1963 Act is due to be replaced later this year by legislation that unites all the censoring and rating authorities into one. Then videos, films, art, books and comics will all be judged under the same guidelines. While this seems like a very good move, and should mean a relaxation of restrictions of importation of many comic book titles, the new Act has a great number of sticking points, and has already been questioned on purely legal grounds, as well as on political and moral grounds. Only time will tell just how this new Act will be enforced.

In the meantime, titles seized by Customs are still reviewed under the 1963 Act, and treated as children's picture story books. **DT**

5th UK Comic Art Awards

The fifth UK Comic Art Awards were announced and presented at the Glasgow Comic Art Convention on Sunday, March 20. These awards are voted on by the UK's professional comics creators.

The winners were:

BEST WRITER: Peter Milligan (*Shade, The Changing Man, Enigma*, and *The Extremist*, all from Vertigo)

BEST ARTIST: Duncan Fegredo (*The Enigma*, and covers to *Shade*, both from Vertigo)

BEST WRITER/ARTIST: Frank Miller (*Sin City*, from Legend, and writer on *Man Without Fear*, from Marvel)

BEST NEWCOMER: Frank Quitely, artist on *Shumura* and *The Missionary Man*, from *Judge Dredd Megazine*/Fleetway

BEST AUXILIARY CONTRIBUTOR: Ellie DeVille, letterer

BEST NEW PUBLICATION: *Man Without Fear*, by Miller & John Romita, Jr., from Marvel

BEST PUBLISHER: DC Comics

BEST ONGOING PUBLICATION: *Judge Dredd Megazine*, by various, from Fleetway

BEST ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL: *Vendetta in Gotham*, by John Wagner, Alan Grant & Cam Kennedy, from Fleetway & DC

BEST BOOK COLLECTION: *Hugo Tate, O America*, by Nick Abadzis from Atomeka Press, previously serialized in *Deadline*

SPECIAL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: Will Eisner **MT**

QUALITY SERVICE

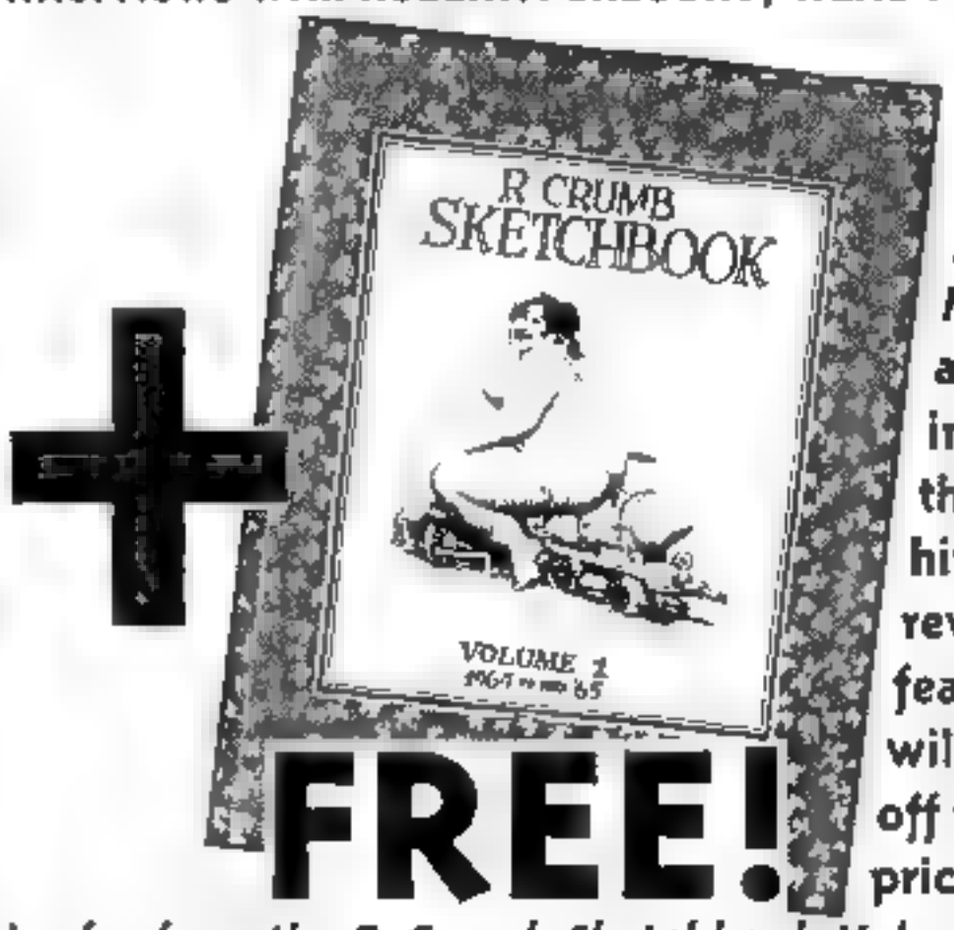
ASSOCIATED PRINTERS
402 HILL AVENUE
GRAFTON, ND 58237
PHONE 701-352-0640

Printers of comic books,
catalogs, magazines & newspapers
for the publishing trade.
Established in 1923.

FREE! Journal Sub Giveaway!

Here's the deal: you get 12 issues of *The Comics Journal*, saving 40% off the newsstand price, plus a FREE copy of the *R. Crumb Sketchbook, Volume One*— in short, an $80 value for only $35 !!

Let's face it — this is an offer you can't refuse. *The Comics Journal* is the most anticipated and discussed comics magazine in the world. In the next year you'll read major interviews with ROBERTA GREGORY, WENDY & RICHARD PINI, NEIL GAIMAN, JOE COLEMAN, CLIVE BARKER, JOE KUBERT, MARK MARTIN, and many others in addition to the usual hard-hitting news, reviews, and features. Not only will you save 40% off the newsstand price, we'll throw in, for free, the *R. Crumb Sketchbook, Volume One*, a 160-page (16 in full color) collection of drawings by the greatest comics master of our time.



FREE!

This offer isn't going to last forever, so clip this coupon or call us toll-free today! 1-800-657 1100.

Four-time HARVEY AWARD WINNER!

"...The most definitive guide to the comics world... *The Comics Journal*, put simply, is the cayenne pepper of comics fandom, and what's life without a little spice anyway?" —*Your Flesh*

ORDER BY PHONE
Toll Free with Visa or Mastercard:
1-800-657-1100

☐ Yes! I want the JOURNAL SUB GIVEAWAY. Enclosed is $35.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Method of payment ☐ Check or money order Visa ☐ Mastercard

_____

Credit Card # Expires

_____

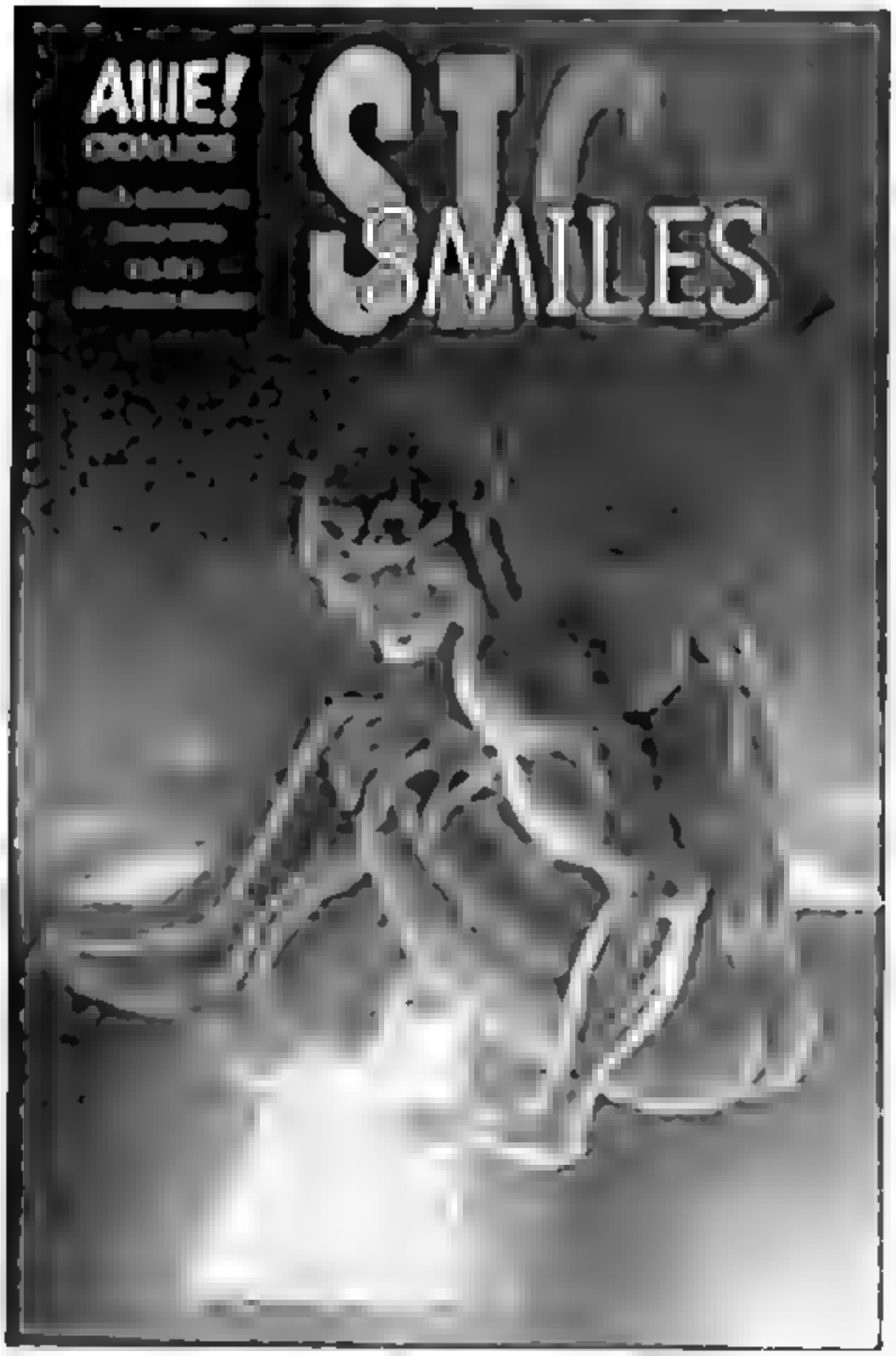
Daytime phone # for credit card orders

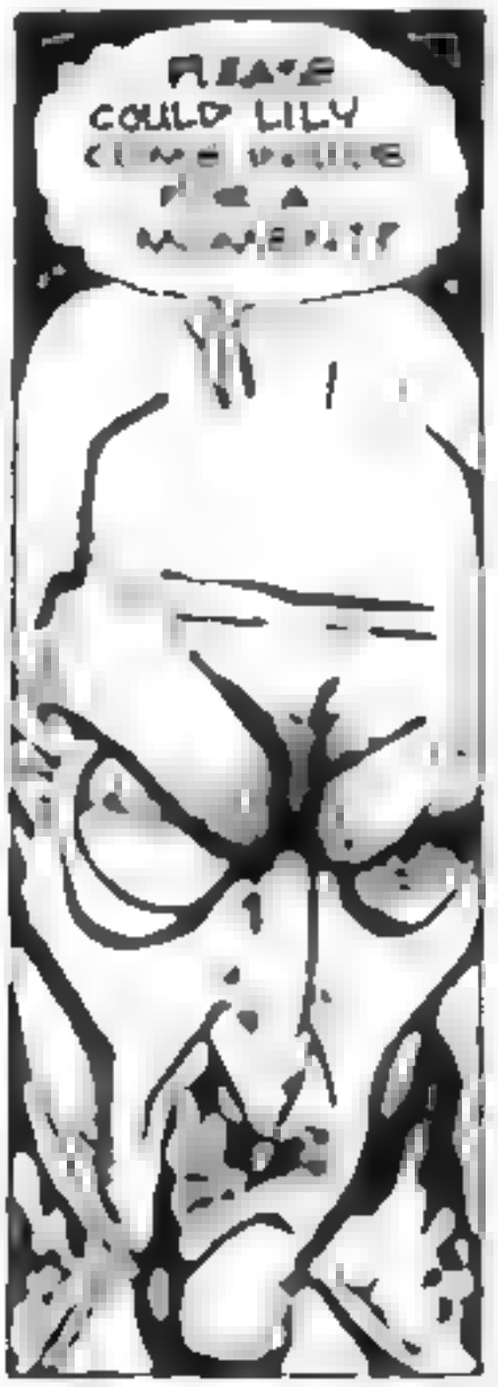
Send to: GIVEAWAY c/o The Comics Journal, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, Washington 98115.
This offer is available to new subscribers only and expires July 31,1994.

Allie! Comics Presents:

A new horror anthology

For Mature Readers • Issue One In June

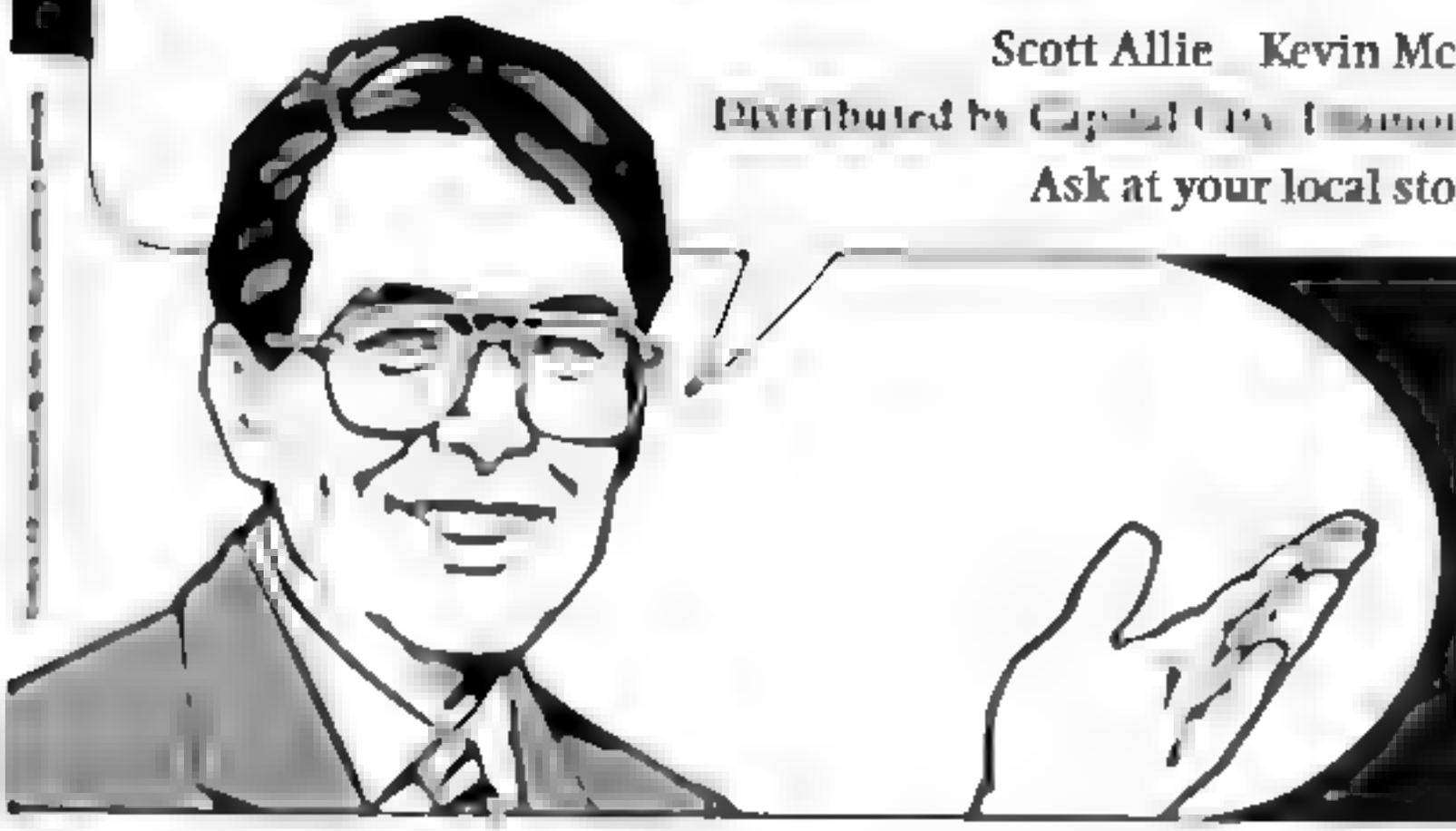




Scott Allie Kevin McGovern Lisa Adams

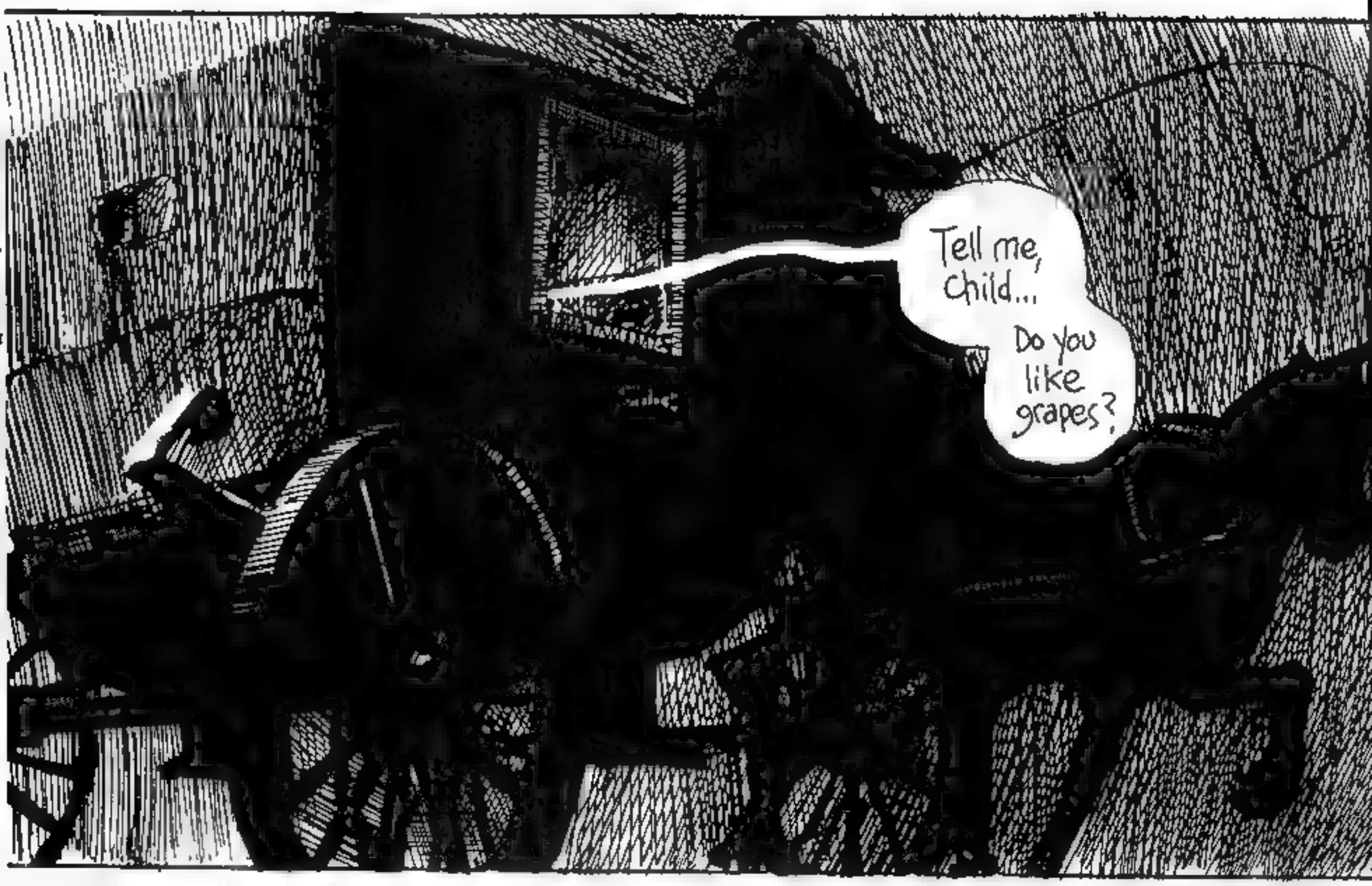
Distributed by Capital City Diamond Brooklyn Comics & Heroes World

Ask at your local store, or send $2.50 to:



ALLIE! COMICS

2105 SE 34th Ave.
Portland OR 97214
503-233-4023



COMICS LIBRARY

Victoria's Secret

From Hell Vol. 1-4

A Review By EDWARD SHANNON

ALTHOUGH IT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT as a reasonably mature adult to recommend that other reasonably mature adults sit and read a comic book, sometimes a comic comes along that makes much of the toil worthwhile. Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell*, among the finest and most accessible comic book work currently being published, is doubly worth discussing, as it aptly demonstrates both the best and the worst qualities of comics written for mature audiences.

Rooted in historical fact and grim legend, *From Hell* is a richly researched exploration of the Jack the Ripper crimes, and Englishmen Moore and Campbell have created a work which fairly drips with authentic detail. Nowhere do we see this quality better than in volume two, in which we find Dr. William Gull, physician to Queen Victoria and writer Moore's candidate for the Ripper, leading a henchman about London in preparation for the crimes. In stark black and white, artist Campbell recreates the city as it existed in 1888 in more faithful detail than would be possible in even the most lavish Hollywood production. This simple tour of the city takes on a profoundly sinister, even occult, air as Gull elaborates on his arcane motives for the murders.

Remarkably, for a form known for the lurid, the first two volumes end before a single murder has taken place. Over one hundred pages into a comic book story about history's most famous serial killer without a murder in sight, Moore and Campbell manage to mesmerize and terrify their audience in a manner Stephen King and his ilk seldom approach, this is a horror of anticipation, not shock. Even the third volume, which chronicles Gull's first murder, emphasizes not the crime so much as the various "entities" surrounding them: the women, Gull, Victoria, Freemasonry, the Empire, the city, the era.

Backing up nearly every panel with extensive, fascinating endnotes, Moore—best known for the revisionist superhero tales *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta* — has here crafted a tale both tightly plotted and peopled with very human characters. The London streetwalkers we know to be the Ripper's historical victims — Marie Kelly, Annie Chapman, and the others — are presented as women forced by circumstances beyond their control into lives of prostitution and poverty. This is no Victorian *Pretty Woman*, there are no whores with hearts of gold here. Forced to pay "protection" money to their pimps, the women are entangled in a scheme to blackmail the Royal family, threatening to reveal the identity of a "Royal baby" born to one of their own and seeking the lordly sum of ten pounds for their silence. Hence the Queen's command

TOP: *William Gull meets his first victim in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's* From Hell, *Vol. 3*
ABOVE: *Victoria Regina, Queen of England, Empress of India, and protector of the sacred reputation of the House of Windsor, from Vol. 2*

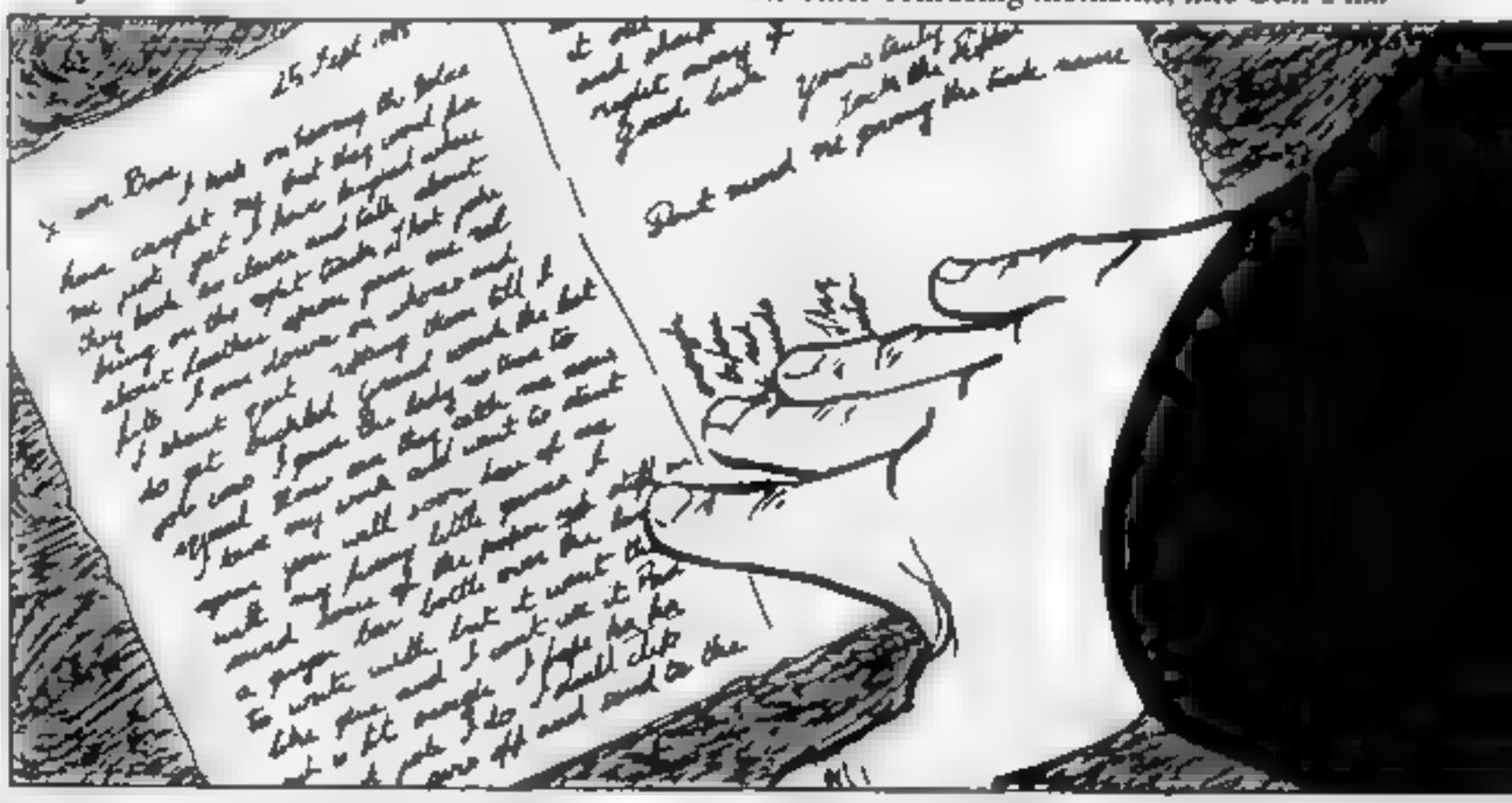
to Gull. "Be about your work."

Moore admits in his endnotes that there is a great deal of speculation involved in all of this, but it works nonetheless. (He credits Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* as the source of both the blackmail plot and the claim that Gull was the killer but refers to many other sources as well.) His tale is horrific not only because we know what awaits these women, but also because their lives of abject poverty are too fascinating and dreadful to gloss over. These are not the faceless victims of a horror film but well-realized and very human creations, harshly but touchingly etched to life with Campbell's subtle pen and inks

Moore and Campbell's portrayal of the prostitutes is enhanced by minute details; *From Hell* knits such small touches as the average price of a prostitute's services in 1880's London (the "thrupenny upright," as these quick encounters against alleyway walls were apparently known), biographical and biological accuracy (Marie Kelly was pregnant when she died; Moore portrays the child's loveless conception), and even the slang of the era into a rich black and white tapestry. The book's focus on these oppressed women serves to make the almost preternaturally misogynistic Gull all the more terrifying when he begins to plan his crimes in volume two and eerily detached as he commits his first murder in volume three.

However, neither the story itself nor Campbell's delightful art is the book's chief virtue. Here is an alternative comic by two creators who work together almost seamlessly. One need only look at the chillingly captivating storytelling in chapter two, "A State of Darkness," to see the extent of the success of Moore and Campbell's collaboration. Ostensibly a brief biography of Gull, "State of Darkness" weaves its themes of darkness and dissection together toward as powerful a climax as you'll ever need to see.

For the first few years of its existence, *From Hell* dribbled out sporadically in the worst comic book tradition. However, its new publisher, Kitchen Sink, has begun to release the book on a regular schedule. Two years separated the release of volumes one and two, but three and four both appeared in just the past few months. I take this as a welcome demonstration of Kitchen Sink's confidence in the book. The revised cover format of volumes three and four, with more color (and more blood), seems to indicate that Kitchen is anxious to sell a few of these books. While I can't say I approve of the Aesthetics of Todd Klein's new logo (I prefer Campbell's scratchy and unassuming original), I hope that the move is evidence that Kitchen Sink is giving the book the marketing push it richly deserves



Like the first two installments in the series, volume three gracefully includes the era's unlikeliest cross-over guest stars: John (The Elephant Man) Merrick, Indian visionary Black Elk, even — oddly enough — Adolph Hitler's parents. In this volume, Moore's story, always a bit removed from "the real," begins to truly dip into the mystic, with events like Gull's hallucination as he butchers poor Polly Nicholls and the Hitlers' brief cameo (as they conceive little Adolph). Volume three also demonstrates that Eddie Campbell is not afraid to play with his audience's expectations. Here, he substitutes gray washes for his heavy pen and ink for several scenes to great effect.

The most recent installment, volume four, continues the fine work we have come to expect from this series. It also continues the curious mystical touches that began with Mr. and Mrs. Hitler's appearance. Gull, while escorting Annie Chapman to her doom, looks into a window and spies a middle-class twentieth century living room, television and all. Moore explains this and other confusing moments, like Gull's hallucinations and the Hitler family's appearance, in his footnotes, but I can't help thinking that some of these digressions are just that: digressions. After all, if the reader needs footnotes just to follow the story (as opposed to filling in interesting background notes), one questions the efficiency of the script. But this is a minor complaint, really; just five or six panels out of what is apparently going to be a very long story (*From Hell* is subtitled "a melodrama in sixteen parts," and with volume four, encompassing chapters seven and eight, we top two hundred pages). This volume also marks the beginning of Moore's explanation of the famous letters the London police of 1888 received, allegedly from the Ripper himself. Moore lays the blame at the feet of some enterprising journalists. With this sub-plot, we get a fuller idea of the metaphorical implications Moore means to give to the Ripper killings as a sort of beginning for so much of what's bad about the twentieth century.

Moore and Campbell demonstrate that comics need only be limited by their creators' imaginations. That these two men can create such a profound fiction out of such well-worn material as the Ripper murders is a testament to the versatility and power of the comic book form. The book is unsatisfying only in that it is unfinished, but it is so enthralling as to be well worth the wait for future installments. Here is an "alternative" comic that is alternative in the truest sense of the word. In *From Hell*, we have a departure from both adventure stories as well as from the hip, ironic, iconoclastic humor of so many other alternative books. *From Hell*'s fascination with the past pushes comics into the future, and it is a book that comic fans can cherish and that can bring non-comics readers to comics. Go ahead, read it, but leave the lights on. ●

TOP: *The first fake letter to the police, which christens the killer as Jack the Ripper, from Vol. 4*
ABOVE: *Gull's hapless assistant Netley, about to start the mutilation of Polly Nicholls in Vol. 3*
RIGHT: *John Pizer, the first suspect, from Vol. 4*

The Symbolism of the Ungodly

The Mystery Play

A Review By NG SUAT TONG

mystery — *An incident in the life of our Lord regarded as an object of commemoration... or as having mystical significance. Hence each of the fifteen divisions of the rosary corresponding to the "mystery of redemption"*

— Oxford English Dictionary

THE STORY GOES that such was the efficacy of the printing press in spreading Protestant ideas in Europe that Pope Paul IV decided in 1589 to create a blacklist of banned books, namely the "Index of Prohibited Books." Grant Morrison and Jon J Muth's *The Mystery Play* would certainly have found itself on that list, though one might question the aesthetic appeal of placing it alongside works by such luminaries as Martin Luther and Albert Camus Is *The Mystery Play* blasphemous? Is it sacrilegious or even heretical? Is it thoroughly satanic? Well, it certainly strives earnestly to attain all these virtues. *The Mystery Play* includes such earthly delights as God, dressed up like Blake's *The Ancient of Days,* with his boxer shorts tastefully revealed. There's also a Clive Barker-like moment when God finds himself in a pig sty. It's a biblical reference, you see: God being consumed by the Gerasene demoniac.

To be honest though, the kind of subversiveness found here is as banal and impotent as the kind of drivel you find in the tabloids, though lamentably not quite as humorous. Works like these are self-congratulatory pats on the populace's collective pagan backs. When will comic writers, presumably at the forefront of comic art, grow up and ask some truly difficult and relevant questions? But I digress. The plot first for the uninitiated..

This would appeal to any relative of Anton Lavey or Aleister Crowley for that matter. A mystery play offers a town the chance of rejuvenating itself In the midst of all the collective fervor, however, the old God is killed. Lucifer is the prime suspect and, as the story progresses and the investigation intensifies, the townsfolk begin to fall apart at the seams. This nifty idea begins to show the first signs of decay when an ersatz (in more ways than one) detective-philosopher modeled on Mr. Muth called Carpenter (it's an allegory, folks; he even lives at the King's hotel) decides to investigate and meets the ultimate murder story cliché, the forensic pathologist. Yes, you've guessed it, he's heartless, a little deranged and has wet dreams about cutting and peeling the skin off cadavers, the Almighty in particular Trust me, I've been in post-mortem rooms before and done a fair bit of cutting myself and I assure you, PMs aren't half this exciting, though they can be amusing in ways the public would fail to appreciate.

Apparently, Morrison hasn't learnt anything from the little disasters of *Arkham Asylum*, since, in the midst of an interrogation session, he makes Carpenter (yes, he's a bit psychotic, just like Bats) hallucinate and break down in front of Lucifer, who's named Severs (!), by the way It really is a religious experience of sorts. "Oh, come on!" you say, "It's a comic book!" Indeed it is. You know, I really don't mind seeing people break down from a literary standpoint, and the allegorical nature of the tale does seem to excuse this piece of artistic extravagance. The only problem is that they've just shown Bergman's *The Rite* over here in the British Isles. It's the story of three actors being investigated for putting on an obscene play in which they dress up as demons and perform an "occult" rite. A morbid mystical experience full of psychological tensions and all in black and white to boot. Needless to say, *The Mystery*

ABOVE: *Another Carpenter gets nailed up in Grant Morrison and Jon J Muth's* The Mystery Play

Play compares rather unfavorably with this film.

Since we're on the subject of Bergman, I might as well mention the token priest who takes time out to have a game of miniature golf with Carpenter. The priest is a bit of a liberal theologian (i.e., he doesn't believe in God). More defamatory statements are made about God, and Carpenter even finds an empty church along the golf course to cap off all the "profane" symbolism. All interested readers should at this point review Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly* for a somewhat more enlightened and heartfelt view of this problem

What do the last two examples tell us? Quite simply that *The Mystery Play* is a case of too much ambition contained within too little graphic novel. Where is the poetry amidst all the symbolism? Bergman used two one-and-a-half-hour movies to fully expound on just two issues with *The Mystery Play*. Morrison's piece is just 80 pages long. One may well convince

oneself of the possibility of developing characters, establishing mood and atmosphere, creating poetry, and expounding on religion in four score pages, but such enterprises are inevitably doomed to failure and imperfection. The pacing doesn't help either. This little gem would make Götterdämerung seem like an express train. It's something like a scenic ride through a tunnel. Even Muth shows signs of boredom halfway through. Don't get me wrong, there's no doubt that Muth can be very good at times, with his daring washes, sense of the dramatic, and genius for faces. His art is the main reason for buying this book, there's the entire opening sequence when the mystery play is presented, a flock of ravens gloating over the fallen and desecrated god, the alluring depravity of a blood-splattered post-mortem table, and the rather amusing play on Rembrandt's famous Crucifixion etching The Three Crosses. And he loves to draw women. The book's main female character, Annie Woolf, has a dreamy kind of look and not much else, though this doesn't necessarily reflect on Muth's ability as an artist. It's all a question of space, discipline, conviction and determination.

But I exaggerate. I think it is quite clear, even from the preceding paragraphs, that Morrison isn't simply the literary equivalent of Rob Liefield. I never expect paneled excrement from him, or Muth for that matter. In fact, there are sequences in *The Mystery Play* which work very well indeed. In particular, a walk through a park filled with disconnected, dysfunctional dialogue and symbolic encounters. It is a modern day Eden populated by lovers, the lonely, and people walking aimlessly. Two men walk along a path to some unknown destination like the two disciples on the Emmaus way, waiting for God to appear. Another two carry their "burdens" away from a "tree" which has somehow lost its power. A fight breaks out and we are reminded of Cain and Abel all over again. A smattering of racism hints at Babylonian days past. A woman trips and a multitude of apples scatter across the ground like the countless vices of this world. Filled with all the fear, apprehension and crumbling faith engulfing the town, the park becomes a mini-portrait of the world. It's been done before, but not as sweetly or as ambiguously. Having said this, the sequence might well be a literal walk through a park, but, being planted in the midst of an allegory, I would say it begs interpretation.

In yet another setpiece, Morrison and Muth cut brilliantly between Carpenter, a Catherine wheel (meaningfully used and symbolic of the fluctuations of fortune as in the Tarot), and the discovery of a body to great effect. There's also a sharply edited, beautifully composed and suitably seedy visit to a brothel. Sequences like these can only be done with sufficient economy and impact in the comics, and it is only by toying with such exclusive tools of the trade that the artist can capture an element of greatness. However, the purpose of all these images remains dubious. Do we really need to be impressed with conniving politicians, madmen, and sexual deviations to know about the moral bankruptcy of this world?

And where does chaos and synchronicity fit into all of this? Carpenter is obsessed with these ideas. It's his idea of foreplay. Even the chaos butterfly makes a cameo. Is it all just Morrison's world-view cast upon the story with little concern for its context? Or is it the new religion — science and mysticism entwined — and this book a new kind of mystery play? It certainly has something to do with a significant subplot which runs through the entire story — the murder of a young girl called Sara Downing, a crime for which Carpenter has been falsely convicted and sent to an asylum. The clues leading to her murderer and that of "God" lie hidden in three sections of the book. The first is found in the hallucinatory interrogation sequence in which the mayor, Purves (!), accused at the beginning of the tale of pedophilia, is seen holding a whitewash brush and standing in a blood-splattered nursery. The second clue is found at the brothel he visits, where a raven, fulfilling its job description of foretelling death and disaster, repeats the word "Sarah" one letter at a time while Purves relieves himself on a sex toy. The final clue is found during Carpenter's visit to the aforementioned nursery and murder site where the reality of his hallucination is affirmed. Or is it? While all facts point towards Purves as the killer, Morrison leaves us with some healthy ambiguity, the real question being whether all that has gone on before are simply the experiences of a psychotic individual. The story is purposefully chaotic and tangled as a spider's web. It's meant to be assimilated as a whole, or, as Carpenter says, "I want to see it whole in relation to everything around."

There isn't a summary at the end to tie it all up, only the firm assurance that Carpenter is innocent, just as Jesus was when led to the cross. It isn't the most original of plots by any standard. Actually, it borders on the pedestrian. One might even say that its very existence is to the detriment of the rest of the story. It subverts the entire thrust of the work, which becomes as morally and intellectually engaging as an Agatha Christie novel

Morrison makes it quite clear at the end of

ABOVE: *Annie Woolf betrays Carpenter to the Romans — or, rather, the police*
OPPOSITE TOP: *Annie fingers Carpenter in the London suburb of Gethsemane*
OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *The population grows restless*

the book that the real key to his "mystery play" and the essence of the work is a coat, preferably on a coat hanger. There are a number of coats in the Bible: Jesus' seamless coat, "woven in one piece", "the coat of skins" given to Adam and Eve; Joseph's coat; the priestly robes of Aaron. The main reason for considering a biblical interpretation of the coat is the religious imagery which abounds in this book: a dog (!) named King discovering the real Frank Carpenter, slain in a car crash; the rather obtuse ejaculation of the dog's owner ("My God!") as he discovers the body; crossword puzzles which turn into Cabalistic tables; Carpenter deriving his stigmata from piercing his hand upon some glass; the entire crucifixion scene at the end of the book. But this line of thought allows for little logical interpretation. The key to the coat is Yeats and his symbolism derived from the occult. Two poems of his are of note. The first is quoted by Morrison and the second is central to discovering its meaning in the context of The *Mystery Play:*

"When a man grows old his joy
Grows more deep day after day,
His empty heart is full at length
But he has need of all that strength
Because of the increasing night
That opens her mystery and fright.
Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
The worse a coat upon a coat-hanger."

The Apparitions *(1939)*

The Apparitions was conceived as a result of a series of death dreams which Yeats had between 1933 and 1934. In a letter to Virginia Woolf, he describes seeing first a coat-hanger, then a coat upon the coat-hanger and then a hand in the coat. Woolf later added in an extra detail to this vision, that of "a child's hand." It will be quite apparent to the reader of *The Mystery Play* that Morrison's book has close parallels with the poem. Carpenter, labeled by the press as "The Raincoat Man," is primarily responsible for uncovering, through a series of visions, the real murderer of Sarah Downing (the hand in the coat), and it is Annie Woolf who is shown discovering, for the first time, that Carpenter has been accused of murdering a child.

But there is a deeper significance to Yeats' and Morrison's use of an empty coat as a symbol. In short, the coat, in outlasting its owner, becomes a terrifying vision (and thus premonition) of death. In addition, Yeats' discovery of tragic joy (a focus in this poem) is given another facet in Morrison's personal mystery play, when Carpenter is crucified by a bloodthirsty mob at the end of the book, all that remains is his empty coat nailed to the cross (the coat-hanger), symbolising the joy and horror of understanding, redemption, and sacrifice.

From the opening sequence of a beshrouded mansion to the final compromise of Annie Woolf in her betrayal of Carpenter, Yeats is echoed again and again. Just compare the following verse with the moral dilemma Woolf faces.

"The intellectual man is forced to choose
perfection of the life or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion raging in the dark"

Coole Park and Ballylee, *1931*
(The Choice, *1932*)

By their individual acts of cruelty, both Woolf and the town avoid the "empty purse" of failure, but only to the detriment of their souls (Christian or otherwise). Strangely enough, this would make *The Mystery Play* a moral fable of sorts, but one reeking slightly of Gnostic idiocy

Morrison has had a long love affair with Yeats — just look at Crazy Jane in *The Doom Patrol*, for example. It is thus not surprising to find echoes of his poems throughout this work. A raincoat ripped to shreds in the post-mortem room at the beginning of the story seems to be a reference to the "tattered coat" of *Sailing to Byzantium*. The entire park sequence could, with difficulty, be seen from the point of view of the poet. The aforementioned Catherine wheel recalls Yeats'

"diagram of The Great Wheel which, equipped
with twenty-eight spokes
in commemoration of the lunar month, corresponds
to all things."

(John Unterecker)

Morrison has also absorbed Yeats' cabala-inspired images of the Tree of Knowledge and Life, derived from MacGregor Mathers' *The Kabbala Unveiled*. The tree is described by Unterecker as being a "multiform, ever-branching image" containing a "host of birds" (souls and angels?), thus explaining the rather menacing ravens found perching on a tree when "God" is discovered. Finally, his preoccupation with memory seems to reflect Yeats' three famous beliefs records in *Magic*, in particular the evocation of memory by means of symbols. A hidden agenda, perhaps?

Despite its many flaws, one should understand that *The Mystery Play* is probably Morrison's most mature work in comics to date. Almost for the first time (don't forget *St. Swithin's Day* and other short stories), Morrison has grappled with mature themes without the aid of superheroes or superheroics. In light of this, it would be nice to remember that Yeats used his poem The *Coat* partly to announce a thematic and stylistic departure from his previous works.

'I made my song a coat
Covered with mythologies
Out of old mythologies
From head to throat
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eye
Song, let them take it
As though they'd wrought.
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked"

A Coat *(1914)*

Perhaps Morrison should be congratulated for taking his first tentative steps towards the holy city of Byzantium. The same cannot be said of Muth, for whom works of integrity are generally par for the course, *Havok and Wolverine* notwithstanding. Anyone who has read his *Vanitas* would certainly appreciate how seriously he takes his art. In the end, however, *The Mystery Play* comes across as a rather pointless tale, unnecessarily caught up in a nihilistic view of life and delivered without sufficient artistry, anguish or conviction to convince us that what it says really matters. ●

Stirring the Melting Pot

Love & Rockets X

A Review By ANNE RUBENSTEIN

MORE TYPE HAS BEEN SET on behalf of the Hernandez brothers than any other contemporary cartoonists except maybe Art Speigelman, and God knows they deserve it — but don't let that frighten you. *Love & Rockets X*, Gilbert's new book, is an excellent comic book in all the usual ways that comic books can be good. The characters are charming, the drawings are clear, there are plenty of babes with big hooters. What more could a fanboy ask for? The story as it appears in the book version is fast paced but quite comprehensible, partly because Hernandez added a few pages but mostly because, with three years of chapters gathered together, all the narrative threads are easier to trace. If you have not yet picked up any *Love & Rockets*, here is a good place to start

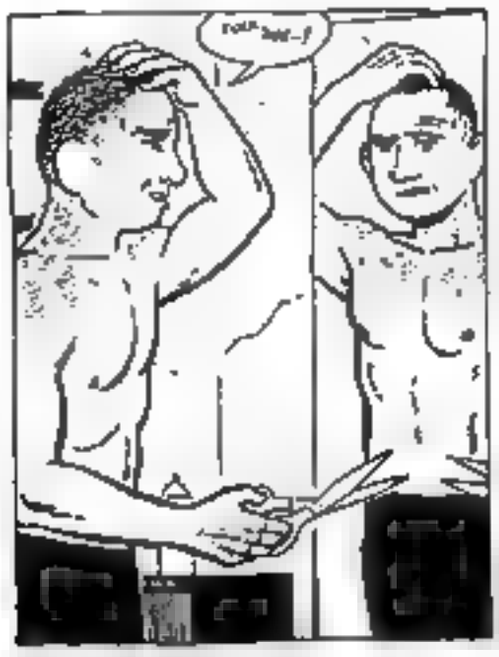
If, on the other hand, you care about aesthetic possibilities of graphic narrative, *Love & Rockets X* is as essential as the rest of the Hernandez canon. Even more than its predecessors, it speaks of the perils and pleasures of culture clash. Rather than the usual comparisons to magical realist novelists, this one calls to mind some of this hemisphere's great syncretists: Carl Fuentes, Anna Deveare Smith, Dizzy Gillespie. Here we have a month or two in the intersecting lives of fifty or more people, each of whom has been crippled, redeemed, enlightened, or destroyed by crossing borders — not just the borders dividing Latin America, Asia, and California, but also the equally notional lines between races, genders, sub-cultures, sexual orientations, social classes. The narrative insists that a least some people can reach beyond these limits, at least some of the time, to hear and speak to each other: it is the closest thing to a utopian fiction that one can imagine coming out of urban America these days.

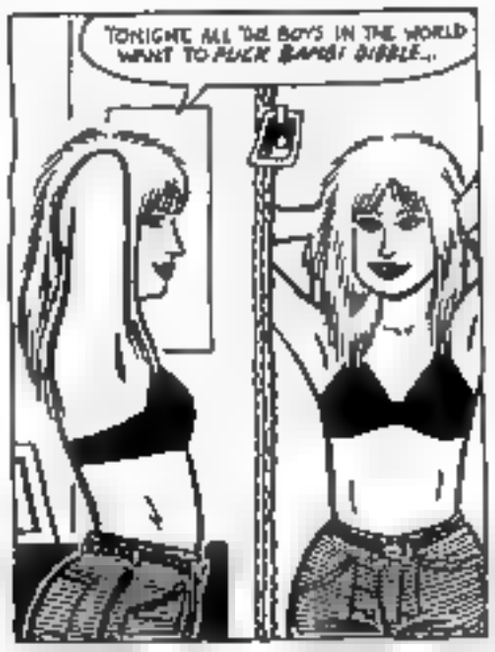
The action, as usual, overflows such artificial categories as beginning, middle, and end. The first half of *Love & Rockets X* leads up to a party where a musical performance is supposed to happen, but doesn't; the rest of the book unravels the implications of certain exchanges made and unmade during the party. At the end of the book, few of the problems raised by this loose-jointed tale — homophobia, bulimia,

poverty, violence, racism, bad taste, xenophobia — have been resolved, although at least one broken heart has been mended. In fact, purely as a story, *Love & Rockets X* barely works. Gilbert Hernandez is so relaxed about the mundanities of plotting that, for example, in mid-story one character's bulimia disappears; she turns out, instead, to be torn between her gay Jewish radical father and her Iraqi (presumably conservative) mother. On the other hand, who cares? You want obsessive attention to detail, go get lost in the Marvel Universe. The narrative here is really little more than an excuse to throw some characters together and see what they do with each other. *Love & Rockets X* — haunted as it is by the memory of the multi-ethnic violence usually referred to as the L.A. riots — can be read as a long meditation on the question of what Americans (*not* just citizens of this particular nation-state) have in common.

What binds them, it turns out, is mostly desire. Almost all of the book's actors either fool around with someone of another ethnicity or the "wrong" gender, or consider it. They may consider it only to indignantly reject the idea, as in this exchange between two African-American men — "You best remember this, son: a brother will do anything to get white pussy."

"Firs': I ain't yo' son... Secon': fuck that Unca Tom bul'shit. "— but the thought crosses their minds. Even the head skinhead's girlfriend carries a torch for her Japanese ex, Sean. Sean, meanwhile, functions as an object of





desire for the half-Iraqi girl who also has some ambivalent attraction to the Latina dyke who Sean drunkenly fails to impregnate on the night of the big party. And so on.

These characters are not merely hot for each other's bodies, but suffer from road fever too. Half the book seems to take place on L.A.'s roads, including a lovely frame of cars zipping in all directions past Marcela the flower-vendor, who herself has just immigrated from Latin America. Long journeys as well as short ones make up a major part of *Love & Rockets X*. Mike the filmmaker takes restless Ivan away from his pointless job to go document the fall of the Berlin Wall. Dippy blond surfer Steve, who functions as a kind of moral center of *Love & Rockets X*, flees south to escape the turmoil of L.A.; Palomar's residents insult him in a language he can't speak ("Gringos are a superstitious and cowardly lot.") but restore his vision, or a least give him a new pair of glasses.

Random acts of kindness across ethnic and sexual divides, like the gift of the glasses, have a magical power in *Love & Rockets X*. The most improbable friendships form. Steve is preserved from complete air-headedness by his concern for Mr. Kang, his mother's disabled Korean tenant. At one point, his worry about far-away Mr. Kang ("the Koreans and blacks back home haven't been getting along so good lately ..I— I just gotta see if he's okay!") somehow seems to encourage one of his homeboy friends to take Mr. Kang shopping. Cambodian Señor Vu, whose family houses an exchange student from Palomar, bends the rules to help her find her long-lost sister ("I left my folks back home... I understand too well how you feel.") and the fact of their reunion mysteriously appears to spring the sister from jail. When the folk of *Love & Rockets X* do not share lust, drugs, information, or the same car, they can at least, temporarily, treat each other like kin.

The only three characters completely oblivious to the lure of the Other, in whatever form, are the three white supremacists who collectively act as the story's bad guy. Individually, much to Hernandez's credit, they come off as pathetic losers, not satanic villains; we see their blindness, but also their doubts, hesitations, and confusion. Hernandez even underlines the sorrow they evoke in friends who remember them as they were before racism carried them away. But — although they precipitate the only plot that *Love & Rockets X* resolves in the course of its 92 pages — they play a relatively small role in the book as a whole. The focus here is not on rage or sorrow, but possibility. This book argues, against all evidence, that maybe most of us can learn to see each other clearly, decipher each other's languages, appreciate each other's styles. The measure of its power is that, for as long as the story lasts, a reader might almost believe it. ●

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: *Just a fraction of the vast character population from Gilbert Hernandez's* Love & Rockets X

What It Means to Be Friends

Wigwam Bam

A Review By ROBERT EDISON SANDIFORD

THE PLOT OF *Wigwam Bam*, Jaime Hernandez's graphic novel serialized in *Love & Rockets* #33-39, is not at all remarkable: Margarita Luisa Chascarrillo (Maggie to friends) travels from Hoppers, L.A., to "the East Coast" (New York, presumably) in search of her former lover, Esperanza Glass (a.k.a. Hopey). The story opens on a deceptively high note with them at a friend's party, and although Hernandez's choice of setting is a clever way to introduce a cast of characters, it's difficult to keep names straight: there's Pat, their hostess; Maya, one positively randy lady; Mary, who is easily snubbed; and a host of others mentioned in passing. What's important to remember, though, is that by the end of the evening, Maggie and Hopey have been kicked out of Mary's apartment, argued about going back to California, and parted ways.

Of interest to Hernandez are the consequences of these actions — to Maggie and Hopey, but especially to those close to them in California: Ray Dominguez, who is involved with Danita, a single mother and stripper, but haunted by the failure of his relationship with Maggie; Isabel "Izzy" Ortiz, who is obsessed with them, Daphne ("Daffy"), who can't comprehend Maggie's subsequent disappearance. The tensions created by Maggie and Hopey's estrangement are the focus of *Wigwam Bam*.

The care Hernandez takes in his exposition is most apparent in his artwork, which is more fluid than the occasionally contrived narrative. Hernandez, for instance, clearly loves women and drawing them, bumps, curves, and all the nuances in-between. It's possible to pick almost any page, but on page 2, his women have double chins (panel 1), grungy hair, pot bellies (panel 2), big noses and unflattering smiles (panel 3). Yet they are beautiful all the same. They are average, but no less appealing, no less perplexing because of this. Maggie — heavyset with solid hips, thunderous thighs, a big butt, and huge calves — is, at a glance, exuberant, melancholy and naive. Hopey, on the other hand — thin, shorter, alternative for sure — possesses eyes that, from page one, suggest deep cynicism. (On page 86, Jewel, one of her friends, says, "Oh, Hopey's cool. But those mean eyebrows of hers truly reflect her attitude about life.") One gets a feel for Hernandez's characters physically and emotionally, for what they would do, and why.

This is essential, since Hernandez is concerned with the problems of everyday people in search of something they've either lost sight of or left behind, like love, faith, friendship. Despite the intermittent zaniness (e.g., a subplot involving Jewel's mother, Nan Tucker, a legendary, aging comedienne who has a penchant for young women dressed up as little girls) and deft use of satire, he touches on the perils of parenthood, the nature of male-female and same-sex relationships, delinquency, bigotry, and teenage infatuation. So the questions that preoccupy him in *Wigwam Bam* are typically double-barreled: 1) How much of our fate is determined by character, how much by environment, and how much by identity, cultural and otherwise? 2) Why do we always seem to hurt the ones we love, and are such transgressions forgivable?

Hernandez's style is forthright while avoiding quick, careless answers. Whether talking sex or politics, his characters tell it like it is. As a result, the question of identity is a motif running throughout *Wigwam Bam*. Maggie's and Hopey's split is precipitated by an argument over ethnicity. (Maggie is Mexican and Hopey is of Scotch-Colombian descent.) Ray is

ABOVE: *Maggie and Hopey, the Incest Twins, from Jaime Hernandez's* Wigwam Bam.

assaulted by three boys who mistake him for someone else. Barb, Izzy's old college friend, could be Maggie's twin. And — presumably as a joke — Hopey's picture is put on milk and juice cartons with the caption "HAVE YOU SEEN ME?" (Her brother, Joey, is the prime suspect. But if this is a joke, it's a cruel one, and all on Hopey, as the story progresses, it becomes painfully obvious that everyone knows Hopey is missing except Hopey.)

Similarly, a number of the characters repeatedly hurt each other: Nani, Daffy's 16-year-old sister, disses Eddie, her would-be boyfriend, in front of Doyle Blackburn, the supposedly hung older man, who breaks up with Lily, the tough-as-nails stripper, who forgot his birthday in the first place.... (There *is* a touch of soap opera to the proceedings.) This makes the mystery of human motive all the more urgent — and elusive. And yet implicit in Hernandez's story is the understanding that certain actions, especially those of friends, are not to be tolerated.

In *Wigwam Bam*, I am reminded of a short story by Grace Paley called "Listening," in which a character asks the narrator

> *Listen, Faith, why don't you tell my story? You've told everybody's story but mine. I don't even mean my whole story, that's my job. You probably can't. But I mean you've just omitted me from the other stories and I as there... It's been women and men, women and men, fucking, fucking. Goddammit, where the hell is my woman and woman, woman-loving life in all this? And it's not even sensible, because we are friends, we work together, you even care about me*

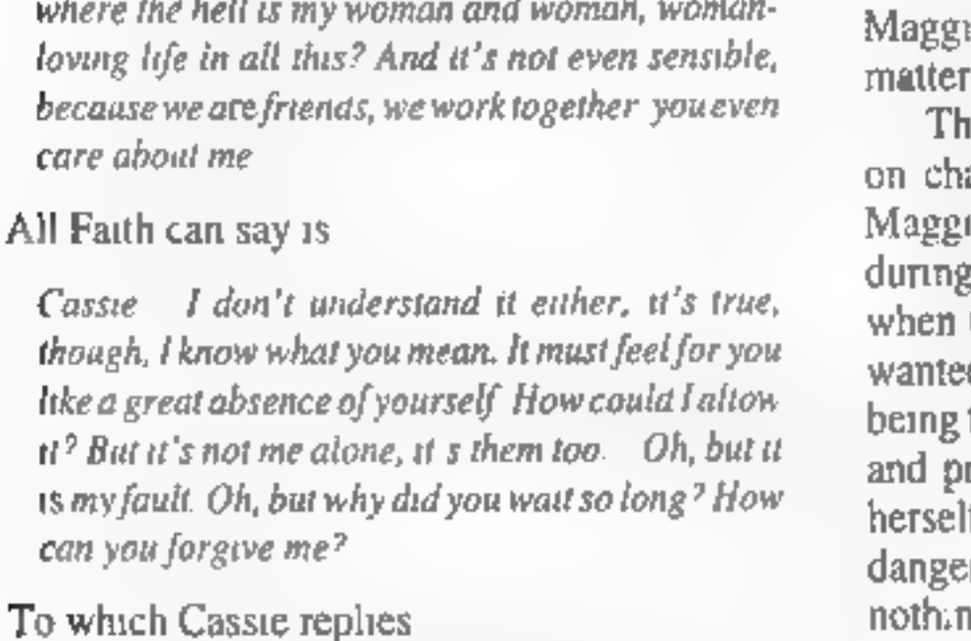
All Faith can say is

> *Cassie. I don't understand it either, it's true, though, I know what you mean. It must feel for you like a great absence of yourself. How could I allow it? But it's not me alone, it's them too. Oh, but it is my fault. Oh, but why did you wait so long? How can you forgive me?*

To which Cassie replies

> *Forgive you? She laughed... With her hand she turned my face to her so my eyes would look into her eyes. You are my friend, I know that, Faith, but I promise you, I won't forgive you, she said. From now on, I'll watch you like a hawk. I do not forgive you.*

In a sense, we owe it to our friends *not* to



forgive them when they hurt us — but to set them straight, keep them honest. This is what Maggie attempts with Hopey. And it doesn't matter that she fails as much as that she tried.

This, too, is how everything finally hinges on character, and on possessing an identity. Maggie and Hopey formed their friendship during their punk rock teenage years, at a time when they were deciding who and what they wanted to be in life. Hopey still thinks it's cool being the kid nihilist, claiming nothing matters and pretending not to care about anyone but herself. Maggie begs to differ. Indeed, it is dangerous to care in this world — Daffy knows nothing but grief when Maggie disappears — and, yes, sometimes there are those days, as Ray and Doyle say, "when you just wanna hop a train." But no matter how much it hurts, Daffy never stops caring, and both Ray and Doyle do their damndest to avoid taking that train to nowhere. In *Wigwam Bam*, these efforts require both personal courage and a strong sense of self.

A little too much happens too fast in *Wigwam Bam*. One reason for this is that Hernandez's story is as dependent on what has gone before as it is on what is to come. Some of the dynamics between certain characters will be lost to readers unfamiliar with the series. Another reason for the accelerated pace is that Hernandez has a habit of compressing a number of scenes into one. He often leaves the reader to fill in the blank spaces between panels. Sometimes, what is left unsaid or unseen contributes to moving the story along, other times, the gaps are confusing. Consequently, his transitions and use of flashbacks could be smoother.

The revelation of Maggie's diary toward the end is helpful, for example, but it comes across as something of a *deus ex machina*. So much in Maggie's diary is linked to the significance of *Wigwam Bam*, so much is meant to be explained by it, that it feels forced and burdened by facts. T

he same may be said about the following flashback to Hopey's unhappy childhood. This flashback relates to a dream Hopey has had at Nan Tucker's, but the build-up to it is otherwise insufficient. Hopey, from what can be ascertained, has created her own mess. The suggestion that her mother is somehow to blame for her ruthless attitude toward life is unfair at this late stage in the story, and unconvincing

Compared to the addition of "... Gonna

Make You My Man," though, these faults are relatively minor. They don't detract from the enjoyment of *Wigwam Bam* as a whole. But "... Gonna Make You My Man," a four-page epilogue absent from the series, too neatly wraps up the story. Besides reiterating the notion that we are often our own worst enemies by having Joey confess to putting Hopey's picture on the milk and juice cartons when he never did, and alluding to Hopey's possible contrition after her life has been threatened, its main purpose is to reveal who put Hopey's picture on the cartons. This purpose is questionable.

Perhaps Hernandez felt the story incomplete — for himself as well as the reader — without this final revelation. Regardless, it doesn't really matter who put Hopey's picture on the cartons, solving this mystery is not so important. The only thing that really matters is bringing Hopey home. And that is clearly a story for another day. ●

TOP: *Danita, Ray, and the pain of relationships.*
ABOVE: *Izzy and Hopey finally have it out.*
LEFT: *The Hoppers Scary People Finders Club.*

ROBERTA GREGORY

FROM THE BEGINNING of her professional drawing career in 1972, Roberta Gregory seemed destined to be one of those cartoonists who toil away in underground comix for years and years with precious little recognition to show for it. Then, in 1991, she started creating a comic entitled *Naughty Bits*, featuring the adventures of Bitchy Bitch, the seething, barely-repressed personification of female rage. Shortly thereafter, everyone suddenly took notice. Mainstream magazines sniffing out the new zeitgeist started calling up, and Roberta Gregory was hot.

Here, from the heights of her new-found fame, Gregory helps Anne Rubenstein separate the substance from the hype and discover the truth behind her true aspirations, the world of internecine comics politicking, and the strange life of a dyke cartoonist

TA RY

CARTOONING ON THE CULTURAL ZEITGEIST

"They had really good comics for children when I was growing up. Nowadays, there's nothing really good for small children. They're all comics starring products."

ANNE RUBENSTEIN: *I wanted to start with your entire life story.*

ROBERTA GREGORY: Whoa! Okay..

RUBENSTEIN: *Where are you from and all that?*

GREGORY: I was born and raised in L.A., California, and the major reason I got into comics — I'm not sure if it's the major reason — but my father did comics, so comics were "okay" when I was a kid

RUBENSTEIN: *What comics?*

GREGORY: Let's see, he wrote and penciled comics mostly for Walt Disney He mostly worked on Donald Duck stories He and Carl Barks were friends and I remember going out to visit Carl Barks with my family He did some of my favorite comics, *Uncle Scrooge.* I also enjoyed *Little Lulu, Sugar and Spike,* and *Dennis the Menace.* They had really good comics for children when I was growing up Nowadays, there's nothing really good for small children They're all comics starring products. I have little cartoons that I did when I was six years old showing these little cats and dogs talking to each other and they have little dialogue balloons over their heads. I think I grew up thinking in terms of sequential illustration

RUBENSTEIN: *Not to mention talking animals. So it wasn't that big a jump to sheep.*

GREGORY: Right. So my dad let me use some of his supplies and was pretty encouraging at first. He got kind of less encouraging when he saw the subject matter that I was drifting towards, but that comes later. So when I was in junior high school I was writing these 20-page fantasy stories with talking animals and talking monsters, historical stories, stories from ancient Egypt that were kind of horrendously drawn. I was presaging my quick and dirty Bitchy Bitch style. I definitely didn't lavish a lot of attention on the drawing — they were just basically a medium to tell the story. My first published comics date from when I was in college.

RUBENSTEIN: *How long ago was that?*

GREGORY: That was 1972, over 20 years ago. I would do comic strips and some illustrations for a paper, *Uncle Jam* published by Phil Yeh of *Frank the Unicorn,* et al I worked with Phil for years. I think my feminist career started in 1974 when I did a little strip starring Frieda the Feminist for the Women's Resource Center newsletter

RUBENSTEIN: *Where was this?*

GREGORY: This was at Cal State Long Beach. My high school counselor advised me against going into art and my father also wasn't very encouraging because, like all good parents, they wanted me to make money. So I went into college with no declared major and then a third of the semester into my college career I realized, "This is really stupid — I should have decided to be an art major." Having an "undeclared" major made it next to impossible to get into art classes. My comic career started pretty much before my art career. Actually, once I managed to get into the art classes, I did really dismally in them. I always remember getting "D"s because we had to do these non-representational projects that showed we had a grasp on design and I just wanted to do comics.

RUBENSTEIN: *Did they make you do that stuff with Color Aid cards?*

GREGORY: Oh yeah, Color Aid! I remember Color Aid! Plus in "Three-Dimensional Design," I remember one project where we had to stick pins in a board and do some sort of design with the heads of these pins, I mean, you couldn't get any further from doing comics. So I think part of the reason that I got such rotten grades in these classes is because I was just getting these dumb projects out of the way so I could get my comics done. Years later I had upper-division illustration classes where you could work on projects of your choice and I actually turned in comic book stories and finally got some decent grades

It was 1974 when I first saw underground comics. There was a head shop down the street which sold the *Freak Brothers* and all the *Zap!* comics, and more importantly, the first issues of *Wimmen's Comix.* That was probably one of the most inspiring things in my career, seeing *Wimmen's Comix.*

RUBENSTEIN: *Before you saw them, did you have any idea that women did comics?*

GREGORY: Not really. I sort of had this vague idea that somebody named Marge had been responsible for *Little Lulu.* When I'd gotten a little bit older I read some of the *Spider-Mans* that my male cousin was into but I got bored with them really quickly. I still have some of the issues from the Steve Ditko days, so I guess I should see if they're worth anything! [laughs] I kind of felt bored with comics but I was writing my own all through high school, these strange little comics that I never expected to do anything with It wasn't until I saw *Wimmen's Comix* — I think the first issue I saw was either #2 or #3 — that it just struck me. here are women who are doing comics about their lives, not just this escapist bullshit. The women had all different kinds of styles too; there were women who were sort of professional, women who had almost high school styles, women who were obsessively into patterning. The style of the art didn't matter, you could pretty much do anything you wanted. That really was sort of a revelation. There actually was a rich array of underground comics by women at that time, *It Ain't Me, Babe,* Trina's *Girl Fights,* and Lyn Chevli and Joyce Farmer who put out *Tits and Clits* and *Pandora's Box,* that was about 1972. If you've ever seen *Best Comics of the Decade 1980s (Vol. 2),* there's actually a story by Joyce Farmer about how they got busted for selling obscene comics back in 1972. It's so frustrating that people don't know the history I was at the Chicago convention last year and I was on the underground comics panel and I launched into this history of women's comics before 1975 All these young women were coming up to me saying, "Wow, I didn't know these comics existed!" The woman I was staying with bought a copy of *Wimmen's Comix* #1 in a plastic bag for $12 and that's kind of the state of things A lot of this work really needs to be reprinted.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Gregory by Gregory, together with her* Naughty Bits *creation, Bitchy Bitch.*
ABOVE: *A 1963 drawing by a 10-year-old Gregory.*
OPPOSITE TOP: *A drawing by a 6-year-old Gregory.*
OPPOSITE INSET: *A Gregory high-school self-portrait, from the story "Me & the Beatles" in the Lennon tribute comic* Johnny
OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *The opening panel from one of the extracurricular comics Grgory did in high school*

So one of the first things I noticed in the first issues of *Wimmen's Comix* was that there really weren't any lesbian stories. I thought, "Here's something that doesn't exist and I have the idea to do it, so it's almost an obligation for me to turn this motivation into something concrete."

RUBENSTEIN: *Can we back up for a second and talk about I remember from the* Gay Comics #16 *story that you were sort of coming out in college.*

GREGORY: This sort of fits just after my first appearance in *Wimmen's Comix.* But I was always sort of out, people always thought I was queer or different from the age of 13 or so. I didn't have to go out and get laid to prove it. I never felt really politically attached to, "Okay, I'm a lesbian, I have to do this, I have to do that." Actually I never even liked the concept "lesbian" because I thought, "Who cares who you sleep with?" Now, 20 years later, I'm still bristling about the idea of "Who cares who you sleep with!" Anyway, I moved out of the dorms after two years and I was living with my first girlfriend and she subscribed to *Modern Romance* magazine which had incredibly awful romance stories, these hetero romances. So I did a lesbian satire of a *Modern Romance* story and I think the satire was probably lost on anyone who had never read any of these magazines, it just came out as an incredibly bad, embarrassing lesbian love story.

RUBENSTEIN: *It has to be said there's a vast lesbian appetite for that kind of story*

GREGORY: [laughs] That's true. Well, I mean, I don't personally like romance novels, but...

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, I'm not much for them myself, but why does* Desert Hearts *get rented more than any other movie in my neighborhood at the video store? We're suckers for this stuff, there's a huge market for it.*

GREGORY: I guess I was always too cynical to be terribly romantic. Anyway, I cranked out this story, put a lot of sweat into it, it was a four page story, the longest thing I had ever done, and I mailed it into *Wimmen's Comix.* They had this revolving editorship system, and Shelby Sampson was the editor for #4. I think Trina Robbins had done a lesbian story in issue #1, but I could tell that it wasn't a lesbian who wrote the story. So Shelby was just thrilled and she printed it in issue #4 and that was my instant validation — I think I was actually pretty fortunate that there was such a thing as *Wimmen's Comix* because it came out pretty regularly and anybody who had half a grain of talent could get themselves into print and at the time there was a pretty wide distribution system for these

comics, there were all these head shops. Things were really different back then. It's kind of sad that people are losing this perspective.

So I had my first story in *Wimmen's Comix.* Then I was kind of flustered because I wrote another lesbian story, kind of a domestic scene for *Wimmen's Comix* #5 and sent it to the editor of that issue who was Terry Richards. She turned it down because she said it was too much like my other story. I sort of felt the only reason was because it was a story that had lesbians in it and they thought they took care of their lesbian karma for a few issues. That was about the time I was getting in contact with Joyce Farmer and Lyn Chevli. And I was keeping up a correspondence with them, I was proto-networking, and after issue #4 of *Wimmen's Comix* came out, I went to visit Shelby Sampson in San Francisco. She was telling me that they were having trouble selling *Wimmen's Comix* to lesbian bookstores — I guess the shop owners were objecting that the stories didn't seem all that feminist. That's when I got the idea to do a comic book, because I had characters like Frieda Phelps. She was the lead in my *Feminist Funnies* strip from the Women's Resource Center publication at college. So I got the idea to expand that into a comic book. Getting rejected from issue #5 put me in this, "If I want it to be done I guess I'll probably have to do it myself" frame of mind. I got a lot of encouragement and practical tips from Joyce and Lyn and put together *Dynamite Damsels* in 1976. I pretty much wrote and drew it over my summer break

—I was still going to classes at the time—and I'd had some savings because I'd been working part time and I actually got the money together to print it. The content of *Dynamite Damsels* just freaked out this printer in Orange County and they forbid me to ever print anything with them again because my comic had the word "lesbian" in it.

RUBENSTEIN: *Oh no, not that!*

GREGORY: I printed 10,000 *Dynamite Damsels* and that was kind of a low-to-moderate press run in those days. I stashed them all in my garage and sold a lot of them through Last Gasp. Then I touched on this network of women's bookstores by sending out a sample copy and a little letter saying, "These sell for $1 apiece and if you send me $6 I'll send you ten issues." I unloaded an incredible amount of *Dynamite Damsels* that way—ten issues at a time. I guess that's how I got my career going. One thing I noticed was even from the start I had a lot of really positive feedback from men. I guess they mostly picked *Dynamite Damsels* up in the headshops. But that was one of the things that first struck me, because back then I was corresponding with a woman who published a magazine called *Dyke* that was a really radical lesbian quarterly, and I did some illustrations for it. She was kind of angry that I was selling *Dynamite Damsels* through these hetero head shops because after all, as she was saying, people won't appreciate it and these guys are going to draw penises on all the lesbians; it's like pearls before swine. But most of the feedback I got from guys was positive: "It's neat to see some of these issues from a woman's point of view," and "It's great to see a whole comic by a woman." I think that's something that also shaped my thinking; I wanted everybody to be able to get something out of my comic, I didn't want to just do comics for dykes.

ABOVE: *Frieda Phelps, protagonist of Gregory's college strip* Feminist Funnies, *which ran in the newsletter of the Cal State Long Beach Women's Resource Center.*

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *From* Dynamite Damsels, *the expansion of* Feminist Funnies *and Gregory's first solo book.*

OPPOSITE TOP: *Panels from a biographical story in* Wimmen's Comix *#6.*

RUBENSTEIN: *A comic by a dyke for whoever. So somebody told me that* Dynamite Damsels *was the first full-length comic by one woman that they knew of. Is this the first ever?*

GREGORY: I think Mary Wings had put out something called *Come Out Comics* that was a little small press thing. It was legal size folded over with a construction paper cover. But I think this was the first... I think also there was another small press comic called *Witch Dream* that I'd seen that was a metaphysical, Native American, not terribly heavy on the humor comic that looked sort of handmade. So I think there were probably more women that were interested in comics in the early years of the '70s than most people remember. But mine was the first one that was mass produced and launched into the comic distribution channels at the time. And I think it was Joyce Farmer who originally told me that I was the first solo act in underground comics. [laughs] Yeah, she's been real supportive.

RUBENSTEIN: *What's she doing now?*

GREGORY: She's not doing a whole lot, unfortunately. I ran into her at the San Diego convention a couple of years ago. She wasn't at all involved with comics, which is really sad, because I really liked her stuff. My favorite comic artists are people who are artists first and then cartoonists, people that you know really have a sense of art, really have a feel, they didn't just start out copying *Archie* comics. Plus she dealt with abortion in her comics, she dealt with child abuse long before myself or anybody else did. A lot of the things she did really need to be seen by a wider range of people.

RUBENSTEIN: *So what was this about the royalties?*

GREGORY: So I saw her at the convention and she had given me a check for about $40 and said I'd had some work reprinted in Sweden and this was my royalty check and I thought, "Fine, money I wasn't expecting." Then a year or so ago she was saying, "Roberta, could you please take this job off of my hands because I'm supposed to contact these people and get the royalty money to them and I don't know how to contact them and I'm not even involved in comics and my mother is really sick and I have to take care of her and I'm in a new marriage and I can't really stay involved with comics." That's historically been one of the factors that prevents women from pursuing their creative careers—family obligations. So I said, "Sure," since I work at Fantagraphics and I have access to the Rolodex and I could probably get a hold of most everyone. So that's how I took over the task of trying to track people down and get them royalty monies from Sweden which has turned into a massive pain in the neck. The main point was just that it sounds like she's not involved with comics anymore, which I think is a huge loss. The book *Silences* by Tillie Olson has a lot to say about the silencing of women's creative voices. A lot of times individual women just sort of disappear from the creative scene and there are definitely different factors at work that are keeping them from expressing themselves than there are for men.

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, and it's also just true that underground comics is an awfully difficult field to stay in. Mary Wings went off and became a mystery novelist instead of or alongside being a cartoonist.*

GREGORY: I guess she's pursuing greener fields. So after *Dynamite Damsels*... The first issue of *Tits and Clits* I contributed to, I think, was issue #3. It actually had characters from *Dynamite Damsels* in it. I appeared in three issues of *Tits and Clits*, and this brings us to about 1980 when *Gay Comix* appeared, and that was pretty wonderful.

RUBENSTEIN: *That only appeared in 1980? I thought it was*

older than that.

GREGORY: Yeah, 1980 was their first issue and Howard Cruse was the original editor. But I was in just about every issue of that. There are 20 issues out now and I think there's only about four that I haven't appeared in and a lot of those were the special all-one-cartoonist issues. So that was pretty exciting. I really got to do a wide variety of stories. My story in the second issue dealt with bisexuality, in 1981

RUBENSTEIN: *Whoa! That's really early to start digging that out*

GREGORY: Oh yeah. Because I'd already done lesbian soap operas. I guess the problem is I get bored easily and think, "Okay, I've done my lesbian soap opera story..." It's not conscious, it's not like I'm scheming out, "What's the hot new ticket?" I just get these really wacky ideas, like maybe one-tenth or one-twelfth of them actually end up on paper in some publishable form. I definitely have busy muses!

RUBENSTEIN: *So what kind of feedback were you getting in 1980, '81? Were you hearing from your lesbian fans? And what were you starting to hear from them about doing cartoons about bisexuality?*

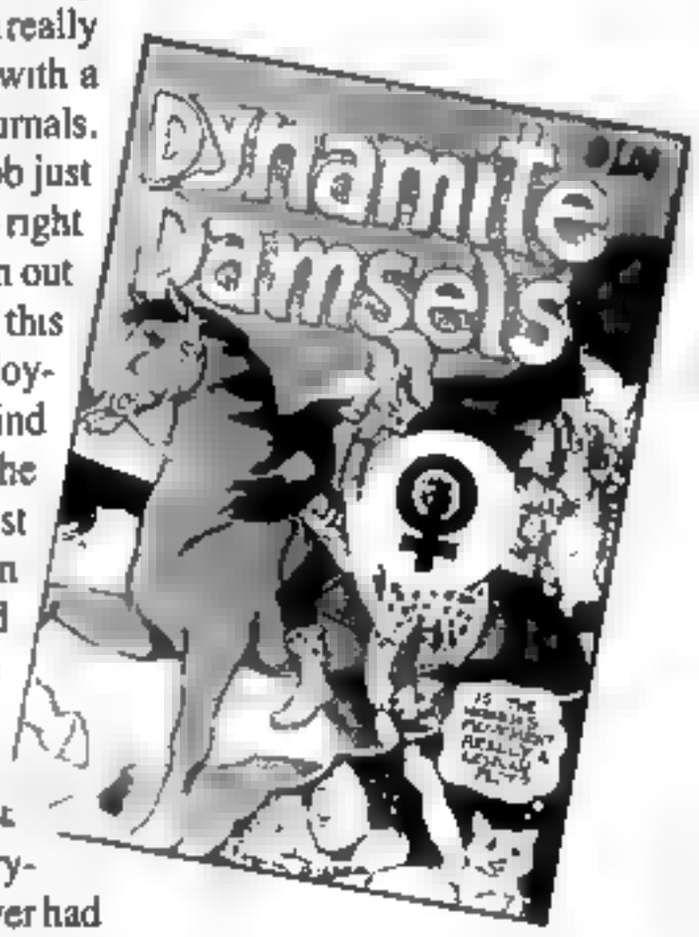
GREGORY: It might be selective memory, but I don't really remember anybody being rotten to me. I think with *Dynamite Damsels* the only really nasty letter I got was from another lesbian. I had a scene where I showed two women who had an open relationship and I remember receiving this torn-out page with Crayola scribbled all over it saying, "This is shit," or something and some furious letter from a woman saying, "I've been a dyke for so many years and this is abominable."

RUBENSTEIN: [laughs] *Dyke seniority, I guess.*

GREGORY: Yeah, the dyke pecking order. But as I recall that's the most negative thing I've received, and it was for *Dynamite Damsels.* Of course, I'm not around to hear people calling me names behind my back. When I was in college there was some really insulting graffiti about me in the men's room, but that's sort of to be expected. I'm sure there's been some really negative fallout, but it doesn't seem to really cross my path. I don't recall getting any really negative feedback from *Gay Comics,* although it wasn't something that I published myself and my address wasn't on it

RUBENSTEIN: *So if there were outraged separatists out there they wouldn't have known where to find you.*

GREGORY: Well, they did have a letters page. If anything, I was mentioned favorably in the letters page. The most negative comment was from Eric Gilbert from Last Gasp, although at the time he was in Paris, and he made a comment that one of my stories wasn't really a comic story — whatever that meant! and I remember just going, "Huh. I wonder what he means?" But I didn't really take it personally because I thought, "Well this guy's in Paris and he probably has some standard for comics that I, being an American, just cannot attain." I seem to recall another letter in which someone said my characters were "wimpy." In issue #4 I did a story about transsexualism because at the time I knew somebody who was transsexual. Also that's when my girlfriend committed suicide and I actually stuck that into a comic as well. So I was dealing with all kinds of unusual topics. Then in 1984, that's when I started working on *Winging It.* I wanted to do a project that was entirely my own, and this was a grand concept... These little characters started appearing in my sketchbooks and I was thinking there was probably a really big story behind this. I had this really boring job with a magazine publisher that published medical trade journals. I can't really complain about the job because the job just came out of the blue when I desperately needed it — right after my girlfriend committed suicide; she had been out of work for a year, I had been out of work for a year, this was 1982, that was when there was record unemployment, and she drank heavily... I could usually find enough money to keep the roof over our heads but she just got really depressed and I was down to my last $100 and just in dire straits and I got this message on my answering machine about a week after she died saying, "Hi, you don't know me, but would you be interested in working for us?" They published medical journals. One of the companies I had unsuccessfully applied to passed my name and number on to them. I was pretty unskilled, I was a really entry-level production artist. The most artistic work I'd ever had was the job I had right out of college in which — get this — I worked for a company that did supplemental educational texts for grade school children and I'd done some of



"A lot of times individual women just sort of disappear from the creative scene."

the illustrations for them freelance. My actual job at the company was to change around the illustrations by other artists so they met certain guidelines. For instance, if there weren't any handicapped, physically challenged kids in this book.— I remember a drawing I had done of a girl sitting at a table talking to her mother, and I had to make it look as though she was sitting in a wheelchair at the table. I had to change the race of children, so I had to stat this art and go in with white-out and make a little white girl into an African American girl

RUBENSTEIN: *I guess the moral of the story is that multiculturalism creates jobs*

GREGORY: I guess, yeah! [laughter] And that was the most artistic J-O-B I had had, and I got it right out of college so I was lucky to get that. So, like I said, I was pretty much unskilled and I got this nine-to-five office sort of job although I worked in their art department. After about six months I was incredibly bored and that's when I started working out *Winging It*. It was just a project I did in my spare time and that kept me busy for about three years

RUBENSTEIN: *That's a long project.*

GREGORY: Uh-huh. It's not even finished. [laughs] There are still little characters snapping at my ankles, crying out for me to finish their stories.

RUBENSTEIN: *That was from 1984 to '87 you were working on that?*

GREGORY: Pretty much, yeah. I published it in early 1988. Concurrently I was also working on *Sheila and the Unicorn*. My parents' idea of being a successful cartoonist is having a newspaper strip, so I remember kicking around this idea for a newspaper strip and sort of training myself to think in three-panel increments. It was this really goofy story of this woman who was so depressed and so neurotic that even when this unicorn appeared from out of nowhere, it didn't affect her at all. It was actually based on someone I used to work with who was incidentally named Sheila, the kind of person who would get up at 5 a.m. on Sunday morning and do her laundry. I mean...! [laughs] So I was working on *Sheila and the Unicorn* at the time as well, although I was trying to do it in this really uniform style, a newspaper strip style, and I just hated it. I ended up making stats of the character sheets of all different percentages, so I had Sheila close up, I'd trace that, put on a unicorn at 60%, trace that on a light table, and I kind of enjoyed the story but I was working on this thinking, "There's no way I want to do this for the rest of my life," making up lame little unicorn gags and bringing in little supporting characters and having Sheila being just as neurotic 20 years from now. So I saved up money by having a real job, I've been in training all my life to live a very unpretentious lifestyle

I first conceptualized *Winging It* as a series of comic books, and 1987 was when I published the first comic, and that was right during the black and white bust which was probably the worst time in history to publish a strange black and white comic, but my life seems to have a theme of bad timing. I was corresponding with Deni Loubert, who at that time was the publisher of Renegade Comics, and she was really helpful and supportive, so I was lucky each time that I embarked on a solo career that I had somebody to give me some important advice. I think her advice was probably that this was the worst time to publish a comic, but of course I wasn't about to hear that. So I published one issue of it and it did pretty pathetically. At the time I decided that rather than publishing issue #2 selling at 1,500 copies, issue #3 selling at 600 copies, I would just bring everything together and publish a graphic novel. I think I was probably also the first solo woman to get it together enough to publish a graphic novel. [laughs] I proved that I'm really good at finding alternative pits to dump my money into. Although one of the good things about *Winging It* is that I self-published this book and then I had to try to market it and that's when I connected up with people in Seattle. I was living in the San Fernando Valley in L.A. at the time and I probably wasted ten years of my

TOP: *Lesbians frolic in Gregory's "Bedroom Politricks," from* Tits & Clits *#6.*
ABOVE: *Beth learns from the horses in "Horses Are Special," from Phil Yeh and Gregory's 1977 one-shot anthology comic* Jam.
OPPOSITE: *Gregory, as pictured in* Jam.

life there. I probably should have moved from graduation to the Bay Area or somewhere cool but I was trying to be responsible and trying to find work.

In 1988 I was selling my books through the mail and placing ads and getting reviews in these small press publications. So I gradually got to know people in different parts of the country, and I seemed to connect best with ones in the Northwest. One of my first correspondences with was Donna Barr, and then another one was Colin Upton, both of whom became very good friends. I corresponded with Edd Vick of MU Press and he invited me up to a comic book convention at the Seattle Center in the fall of 1988. So I traveled up to Seattle with my comics and decided this was not L.A. and I really liked it and people up there seemed to be pretty cool. That's when I found out that Fantagraphics was moving up to Seattle from southern California. I was familiar with some of their comics, although at that time I was really not much of a reader of alternative comics. I sort of knew there was this comic called *Love & Rockets* that everybody thought was good. I'd seen one copy and wasn't really impressed by it. When I'm really busy working on projects of mine I usually don't have the time or want to be influenced by other comics. So all I knew about Fantagraphics was that they were located out in the west end of the San Fernando Valley and published comics that people thought were cool. I'd actually gone to a couple of their parties and they seemed kind of snobbish, to tell the truth [laughs] But I thought, "Hey, these are people that publish comics and they probably need a production artist and I do production art." At this time I had lost the job with the medical journal people and now I was working freelance for a couple of automobile and motorcycle magazine publishers. Really thrilling stuff. Graphs depicting automobile sales and ads for motorcycle parts!

RUBENSTEIN: *Not all that much fun.*

GREGORY: Yeah, I was definitely interested in a change. Plus I lived in the San Fernando Valley which was like hell. [laughs] I think that's where Bitchy Bitch lives, in the San Fernando Valley. She lives in an undefined southern California suburban hellhole.

RUBENSTEIN: *Spending a lot of time in the car and in traffic.*

GREGORY: I actually lucked out. I never had a job that was more than ten minutes' commute. I think something has been watching out for me — although it hadn't seemed so at the time, [laughs] but that's life. You think you're making the biggest mistake in the world and then you look back later and go, "Gee! That's why it happened!" So during the San Fernando Valley years I was probably gathering much more information about comics than I thought at the time. I'd have coffee breaks with these hellishly neurotic people from the rest of the office and I think that's where I got inspired, by observation, to construct some of Bitchy Bitch's co-workers. It's all research. I sent my resumé to Gary Groth and he hired me the next day. So that's how I got to move up to Seattle.

RUBENSTEIN: *They must have known your cartooning work when they hired you.*

GREGORY: I'm not sure, actually. Back in those days I was just *astounded* when people told me they had actually seen me in print somewhere. I felt so obscure! Like I said, I had gone to some of the parties... One of the Fantagraphics parties I went to was when I first published the *Winging It* comic, which was 1987, and I was really enthusiastic, I was one of these new wave, alternative cartoonists and the world was just waiting to recognize my genius, and I brought a stack of these comics and I started giving them out at this Fantagraphics party. This one woman gave me this poisonous look, and later she'd written a really negative review of not only the comic but of me personally in this little publication called *Mondo Comi*. She was saying that the worst thing that happened to her at this party was when this repulsive person came up and gave her a comic, and not only was this comic a waste of trees, but it was a waste of the very resources that produced these trees. She went into a comics shop and was so happy to hear that my comic had done poorly — just vicious stuff! So I think the very first day I went to work at Fantagraphics, Lynette Alcorn-McCubbin, who at that time was the art director of *Amazing Heroes*, sheepishly gave me a copy of *Mondo Comics* and said, "Did you see this?" and I read it and said, "Oh! *That* was the woman at the party!" So I guess I haven't really gotten too many negative reviews, but the ones I have gotten are really doozies. I mean, this one was vicious. But, then again, it was also from a woman. I don't know if guys would be afraid to say something like that to my face, or what, but I think most of what really strike me as really negative and vicious attacks have all come from women — so do with that what you may. Maybe they seem more vicious because I have this hope that women will be more supportive of my efforts. The "sisterhood" thing.

So that brings me up to working at Fantagraphics. It was kind of frustrating to be around all these comics and not really have anything of my own in print. I started *Artistic Licentiousness* I think about a year into my move to Seattle.

RUBENSTEIN: *So that was '89?*

GREGORY: Actually, I think I started working on it in 1990. Michael Dowers, who had published this paper called *The Seattle Star*, wanted to get back into publishing comic books and he had also been working at Fantagraphics

when they first moved to Seattle. He suggested I do a smut comic "so we could make lots of money." So that's when I started working on *Artistic Licentiousness*. The first story I did for Fantagraphics appeared in *Graphic Story Monthly* #6, and that has the first appearance of Bitchy Bitch.

RUBENSTEIN: *I think I remember seeing her there and going, "Whoa! A departure!"*

GREGORY: Yeah. That was the story about the good and evil Robertas. The evil Roberta was drawing Bitchy Bitch who was a horrible caricature of this angst-ridden, frustrated, suicidal cartoon character..

RUBENSTEIN: *So who are you thinking of here? Name names.*

GREGORY: Oh God, I don't know. Ugly art, you know? I think it's more of a genre. I've never been a fan of intentionally ugly art, which is interesting because some of my first reviews of *Naughty Bits* were saying it was intentionally ugly, repulsive art. Then of course the good Roberta was drawing Kitty Kat Toons. The good and evil Robertas end up slaughtering each other with X-acto knives and the real Roberta comes in and sits down and tries to find the energy to do a meaningful comic. I think that pretty much shows where my head was at the time. I think the sheep probably evolved about that time too. I think I came up with sheep because they are about the easiest thing in the world to draw. I put all this really production-heavy cartooning into *Winging It*, and it was almost a cross between William Blake and Doré, as close as someone with my limited skills could attain. I started doing these sheep cartoons for *Comics F/X*, which was a tabloid paper that Edd Vick had started publishing. They were these little, empty-headed "people" that just commented on the issues of the day in their rather limited way. They were actually pretty satisfying because I could really deal with immediate issues through the medium of these little fluffy creatures with beady eyes and no mouths.

So how *Naughty Bits* #1 evolved into the format that we now know is, Gary sent me a memo saying he liked "Crazy Bitches," he liked "Bitchy Bitch Goes to Fantagraphics," but I think he didn't really care for the funny animal stories. That was an eight-page story, so I thought, "Okay, now I've got to come up with another story to replace it." That's how I came up with "Bitchy Bitch Gets Laid." That was the first serious glimpse into Bitchy Bitch's life. Before, she was just this character I developed on a provisional basis to show that I didn't like ugly art, and to show that Fantagraphics was a pretty screwy place to work. She just sort of took on a life of her own. I think that's kind of ironic since I was always doing these comics that I thought would really make an impact like *Winging It*, it wasn't until Bitchy Bitch came up that all hell broke loose.

RUBENSTEIN: *What was the reaction to "Crazy Bitches" in particular and Bitchy Bitch in general?*

GREGORY: Going back to *Naughty Bits* #1, "Crazy Bitches" was originally the only story that was in the original *Naughty Bits* that actually appeared in the final version of *Naughty Bits* #1. I also had this story that I'd written called "A Dream Cum True," which was a spinoff or actually a proto-story from *Artistic Licentiousness* about this overweight, geeky, funny animal cartoonist whose sexy creatures come to life and he has a very, shall we say, unsatisfactory sexual encounter with them.

RUBENSTEIN: *Then that's the bit that becomes the initial bit of* Artistic Licentiousness.

GREGORY: Yeah, I think I was actually working on that concurrently. The other story in *Naughty Bits* #1 was going to be a reprint of the story that appeared in *Tits and Clits* #6 in 1980, which was a funny S&M story between two lesbians. So, as you can see, the original *Naughty Bits* #1 started out being very different than the *Naughty Bits* #1 that everybody knows. I think the only appearance of Bitchy Bitch was the "Bitchy Bitch Goes to Fantagraphics" sequence, which actually appeared in a mini-comic I had done in 1990 called *Yours Truly*. I hadn't had anything in print for a long time and people were probably wondering what I'd been up to, so it was basically autobiographical "Hi, I'm Roberta, and here's what I'm doing and here's my characters," and the "Bitchy Bitch Goes to Fantagraphics" sequence came out of the fact that I was totally stressed and overworked and about on the verge of a nervous breakdown, which shows that things haven't changed all that much [laughs], and all my little characters decide to come to my rescue, and Bitchy Bitch decided to go to Fantagraphics for me so I could stay home and draw. So the "Bitchy Bitch Goes to Fantagraphics" story was actually part of a sequence in which Bitchy Bitch was volunteering to take over for me. Which is why people came in and said, "Roberta doesn't look too good," meaning Bitchy Bitch. So the joke was that people were mistaking me for

TOP LEFT: *A cookie-chomping neurotic from* Wimmen's Comix *#10's "Good Morning!"*
TOP RIGHT: *Panels from the alcohol-soaked tale "Another Coming-Out Story" in* Gay Comix *#3*
ABOVE: *Queer and straight blur together in* Gay Comix *#2's "Unnatural Desires!"*

Bitchy Bitch, but of course *Naughty Bits* readers saw Bitchy Bitch and saw the name Roberta, and the legend began that I am really Bitchy Bitch.

RUBENSTEIN: *And let's clear that up for our readers at home, shall we? Are you Bitchy Bitch?*

GREGORY: Am I? God, I don't think so. My understanding of Bitchy Bitch is that she is the person I would least like to have to be around. But, on the other hand, there's a saying that things you hate in other people are really things that you hate about yourself, so if you hate people for being disorganized, it's because you despise the disorganized part of yourself. Oh gosh... I don't think I'm her. People that know me might argue. I think everybody has little bits of Bitchy Bitch in them. She sort of embodies most of the qualities that most people have that they either try to overcome or try to suppress or try to ignore. She's sort of a textbook case of somebody who really just puts stumbling blocks up in front of herself. She says, "This makes me sick, that makes me sick," and then she's sick the next day. Or something horrible happens to her and it's because, of course, she *knew* it was going to happen! I think part of the reason Bitchy Bitch was so popular is because everybody can really relate to her even though they really don't want to admit it.

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, it's also true that anyone who's ever put in time in an office knows the feeling.*

GREGORY: Oh, yeah. I'm still not quite sure what she does. She has some sort of office job because she sits at a computer all day. No wonder she's so crabby!

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, her back probably hurts and she's getting bad eyestrain.*

GREGORY: Although she does have medical insurance that comes with a nine-to-five job — which is something that we cartoonists do not have. [laughs]

RUBENSTEIN: *Well, I don't know, maybe she's got an HMO and that drives her crazy too.*

GREGORY: Yeah, really, because she never sees the same doctor more than once.

RUBENSTEIN: *She can't get them to prescribe a chiropractor for her and the next thing she knows, she's slaughtering somebody. So Bitchy Bitch arrived, and for people who have no idea what we're talking about, she turned into more or less a success. Gary Groth told me she's been selling fairly well.*

GREGORY: Yeah. I guess she sells the comic book. I'm sure if Bitchy Bitch wasn't in the comic, sales would probably take a nose-dive. But who'd have thunk it?

RUBENSTEIN: *She has this certain universal appeal.*

GREGORY: There is a bottomless pit of potential Bitchy Bitch ideas!

RUBENSTEIN: [laughs] *It's true!*

GREGORY: Yeah, things happen to me now and I go, "What if I were Bitchy Bitch? How would I respond to this?" Oh geez... It's almost frightening how characters can take on a life of their own.

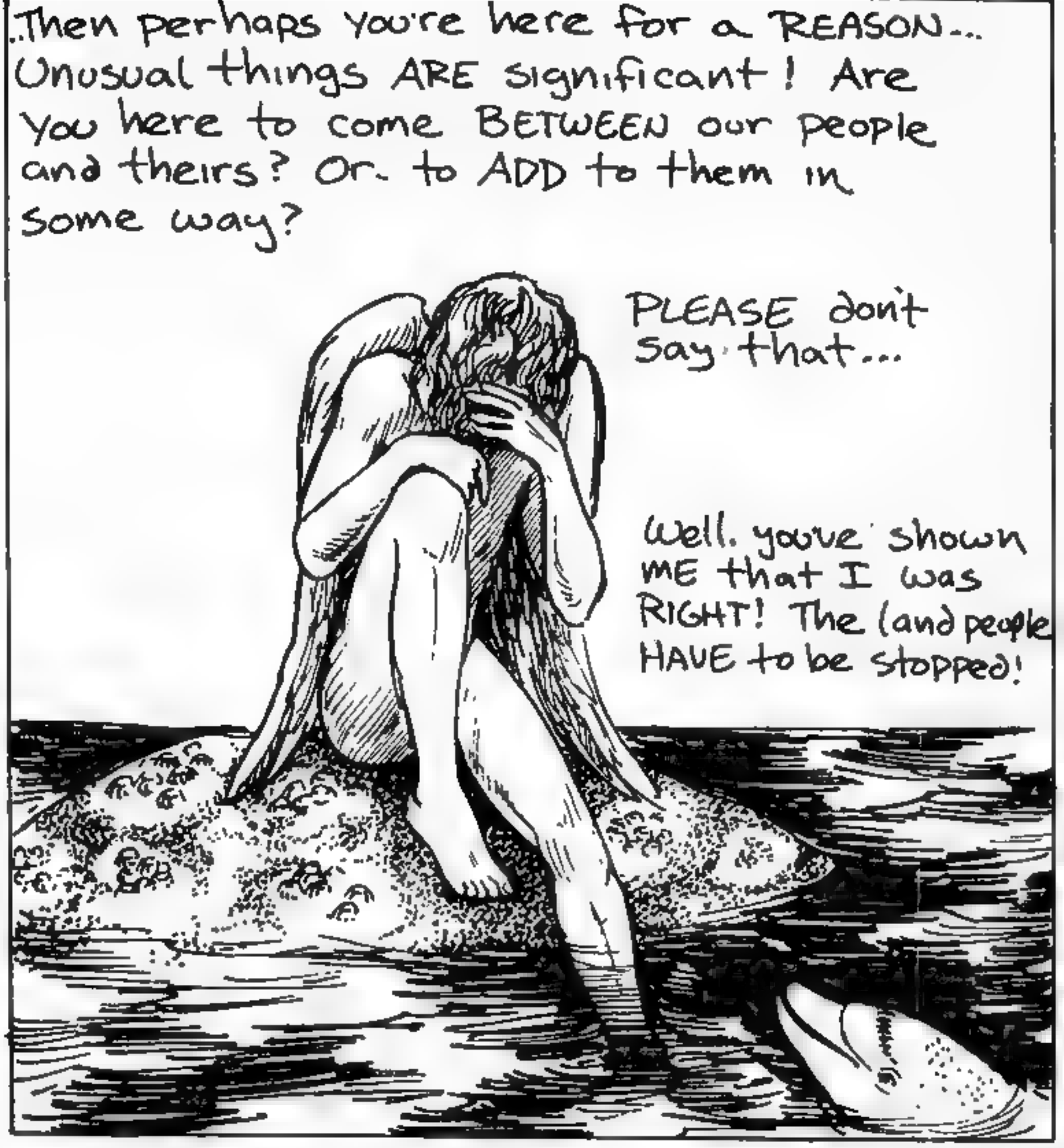
RUBENSTEIN: *So that's sort of your career and life history. I wanted to ask you about how your visual style as an artist has changed in the time that you've been drawing.*

GREGORY: Sure. One of the great things about having my own title, *Naughty Bits*, is that I know I'm always going to have another issue, that there's always going to be another story. It's not like back when I was involved with *Gay Comics* and I had my three pages this year and that's it, you know? Most of my early art just shows this really compressed style in which, "Okay, this is my three-page story, I've got to say everything I want to say for this year on three pages." I think it kind of helped in a way because I've learned to develop this dense writing style in which there's a lot going on, have as much going on with the minimum amount of dialogue and narration. It may not have been a good training ground for my art since the panels were so small and crowded. One of the most important things in comic writing is, since you really are working with a limited format, you only have so many panels on a page, you can't write a 500-page novel and get into flowery descriptive passages, you have to leave a lot of it up to the reader. I find that when I'm writing a sequence, I have to leave a lot of it out, I have a lot of the understood action, understood dialogue going on in the spaces between the panels. In Scott McCloud's book, *Understanding Comics*, he also theorizes about what goes on in the spaces between the panels. I think that's one of the reasons I've found writing comics so interesting and so challenging, because it's really a different kind of writing form than just reading a novel and reading paragraph after paragraph until it's over with. You really have to leave these gaps and trust that the reader is intelligent enough to know what you meant— like when Bitchy Bitch walks into a store, and the next panel she walks out grumbling, the reader hopefully is provided with enough resources to deduce exactly what happened in that store and why she's walking out grumbling. That's one of the powerful things about the comic medium. One of my own theories is the reader is using their left brain and their right brain concurrently; you're

"I think everybody has little bits of Bitchy Bitch in them."

ABOVE: *Joe the confused unicorn tries to overcome human cynicism in Gregory's book* Sheila and the Unicorn.

"Comic stories have such an impact, almost more than seeing a movie, because if you see a movie, you're just passive, you're just letting all this happen to you, and when you're reading a comic, your mind actually has to work to make these connections."



reading the dialogue which is an active activity, and meanwhile the art is impacting you and you're responding to that on a gut level, and that's why comic stories have such an impact, almost more than seeing a movie, because if you see a movie, you're just passive, you're just letting all this happen to you, and when you're reading a comic, your mind actually has to work to make these connections Knowing what I know about Bitchy Bitch, why is she suddenly pissed off about something?

RUBENSTEIN: *It seems like you're much looser and more relaxed in how you draw figures or how much background you put in. I asked Howard Cruse about you and he said that although he admired your work from the first, he thinks that you've had a "big breakthrough" in your drawing: "Her new style is wild, zany, expressive of strong emotions and very kinetic." Do you think you have a new style or does it seem like the same thing to you?*

GREGORY: I think it's definitely a new style. Part of it involves the fact that I started doing *Naughty Bits* as a regular series and I was still working most of the time at Fantagraphics and I only had X amount of time to put out a comic, so I pretty much had to say as much as I possibly could with as little visual material as possible — "Let's see how many pages I can crank out tonight." I think that had a lot to do with it. When I was working on *Winging It* I was so nit-picky with the art. In the first issue, I actually did little pencil sketches of figures, then I had a light table and traced them onto the boards, put the characters together so it looked like they were talking to each other, then I went back with pencil and finished that up, then inked them and the characters all looked like mannequins. I was really self-conscious because *Winging It* was my big project and everything had to be perfect, so of course it ended up looking like hell. [laughs] But with *Naughty Bits*, there's absolutely no way to draw Bitchy Bitch wrong — that's the really exciting thing about her — she'd have a fit and suddenly grow three extra fingers. That's what Bitchy Bitch does when she has a fit! A lot of it also has to do with the fact that the stories have a lot of humor. Some of my early stories in *Gay Comics* were also very humorous and very simply drawn. I'm thinking in particular about the one in #3 about the woman who becomes an alcoholic — that's a really loose, unself-conscious style. For the most part though, I've usually been pretty frustrated with my style of drawing. I always felt really comfortable doing scenes out of nature, drawing animals, drawing the natural

ABOVE: *Ariehel the angel, from part one of Gregory's graphic novel* Winging It.

world, drawing water, drawing fish, but once it came to drawing people, I just really tightened up. I think part of it goes back to college and getting really miserable grades in life drawing. I knew that my people didn't look good, so of course when you're just starting out drawing something and you know you can't draw people properly, then of course you're not going to draw people properly — it's a self-fulfilling prophecy, which is one of the lessons we learn from Bitchy Bitch. So it was so tough to come up with a style where I could just — I mean, I don't do preliminary sketches. The script I work from looks almost like a battle plan — there's dialogue, there's arrows, there's numbers, there's a sea of phrases, maybe little stick figures, then I go right to the board and script out what goes on in what panel, what the dialogue is, then I just start up with blue pencil and put the figures in roughly and sometimes I just start inking from that. So it's really exciting. Not only that I can get lots of pages done in half the time that another cartoonist would do [laughs], but it actually looks good. It's not self-conscious. I think self-consciousness has always been one of my biggest stumbling blocks in art. There's almost no way to be self-conscious about doing Bitchy Bitch. It's incredibly liberating.

RUBENSTEIN: *This comes out of Bitchy Bitch again, but also out of your much earlier stuff with* Gay Comics; *do you see yourself as an autobiographical cartoonist? In certain ways you're a foremother of the autobiographical school.*

GREGORY: I am?

RUBENSTEIN: *Well, sure. You certainly thought of it before Joe Matt did. Do you think of yourself that way at all?*

GREGORY: I guess most of my subject matter has come out of my life and people I know. For instance, in the intro to *Dynamite Damsels,* I had the cat saying, "She's supposed to be Frieda," meaning myself, and from that people started thinking it was autobiographical. It was the response that people had to that that made me realize I was looking at the backgrounds of these stories differently from other people. I created this character that was a positive version of a scapegoat, she was sort of a recipient of all the negative things that really didn't happen to me but could have — somebody who responds to these situations pretty much in the way I would if I was in that person's shoes.

RUBENSTEIN: *But it's all situations that didn't happen.*

GREGORY: No. Not specifically.

RUBENSTEIN: *What are you looking at lately in general in terms of comics? What do you like? Who's out there that you think is good?*

"I've usually been pretty frustrated with my style of drawing."

LEFT: *Interspecies fun in* Winging It.
ABOVE: *Intergender fun from* Artistic Licentiousness *#1. Gregory's bid for a share of the dirty comics market.*

ABOVE: *Gregory shares some of her considerable travel acumen in "'The Family of Personkind,' or 'No matter where you go, there you are!'" from* Naughty Bits *#11*
ABOVE INSET: *Gregory gets in the reader's face in* Naughty Bits *#3*

GREGORY: I don't really read a whole lot of comics, especially now that I'm really... I seem to be more involved with my own comics and I have less time now to even look at other comics by other people. Most of the comics I like are comics by people that I know personally. Comics I really look forward to the next issue: *Cud* by Terry LaBan, I like *Hate*, *Hate* is one of the funniest things that I've seen; as far as art I really admire, I really admire people who are artists first and have incorporated that into a really effective cartooning style. Terry LaBan is one of my favorite artists. He makes his art look so easy! Donna Barr, I'm just in awe of Donna Barr, I think she's really underrated.

RUBENSTEIN: *Does your work reflects other people's and other people's reflects yours? What the connections are between you and artists you know, or whose work you admire?*

GREGORY: I think it actually does, because I do recall seeing other people's comics and I'll look at little phrases or little figures and I'll think, "I wonder if Bitchy Bitch inspired that?" Before, I just totally felt like I was working off in left field with these totally bizarre ideas. For my own sake, I would do these stories and see if anybody could appreciate the, uh-hem, vast quantities of genius in them, or whether or not... I actually do feel like there is a peer group of alternative cartoonists that I'm part of. I don't know if it's just living in Seattle and being more in contact with these other cartoonists, seeing how their comics reflect their own lives. I can actually see myself or see some of my comics being influential on other people, which is a real departure.

RUBENSTEIN: *I think you've now appeared as a comic book character, haven't you?*

GREGORY: I definitely appeared in *Big Thing* #2. I was stupid enough to go out to Fort Casey and get myself arrested with Colin Upton and his artwank pals.

RUBENSTEIN: *And who did the one about the convention, and where did that appear?*

GREGORY: That's Donna Barr. Those were the comics about the Angoulême convention that appeared in *Comics Journal* #156. Donna, Colin and I all did stories about the convention and we all appeared in each other's comics.

RUBENSTEIN: *It's very odd, all three of you being cartoonists and then appearing together and separately in each other's cartoons.*

GREGORY: Oh, that's 'cause we're pals! We hang out together whenever we get the chance. So I guess we're sort of like the Northwest version of Joe Matt, Chester Brown and Seth.

RUBENSTEIN: *But it's an odd phenomenon, people becoming characters and being creators at the same time — it's the sort of thing that literary theorists find very confusing*

GREGORY: I guess I don't think it's surprising at all if you actually hang out with other cartoonists. [laughs] And those cartoonists tend to do comics that are based on real life, or their lives in particular, then it's inevitable that you'll show up in other people's comics. I think that's actually pretty cool. I like autobiographical cartoons and comics. I don't think Chester Brown has gone further than he has to. [laughs] *Peep Show* is also a comic that I look forward to, with a mixture of fascination and horror.

RUBENSTEIN: *It's so extreme.*

GREGORY: Well, somebody's got to do it. I've always been pretty private about my life, I think that's why I do autobiographical work in which I have these other characters stand in for me. For instance, there was Frieda in *Dynamite Damsels*, and Lupe in *Winging It*, and I guess Bitchy Bitch in a way, she's sort of a stand-in, if I was hetero and neurotic and wasn't able to put my life in perspective and see what I was doing to myself

RUBENSTEIN: *And had no creative outlet.*

GREGORY: Exactly! That probably has a lot to do with it. I think the fact that I'm able to have these characters stand in for me, that's why a lot of my work is considered autobiographical, even though I really don't have this obsession with showing people how I masturbate.

RUBENSTEIN: *It's very odd, the assumption that people who are characters in each other's and their own comic books are necessarily also telling the truth all the time. It's a very strange assumption.*

GREGORY: I think it's because comic books have traditionally either been either totally escapist or completely autobiographical. I think people have trouble making the connection that you can do comics that are based on real life. I think *Hate* is the same way because Pete's characters are so realistic, you'd swear you knew them. And actually

I think some of the characters really are more real-life people than Pete may be willing to let on. [laughter] He doesn't expose people with their full names and say, "This person is a jerk." I think that's a relatively unexplored format with comics — actually having stories that really hit home and have characters that people feel like they know almost as well as they know a close friend. I guess it just boils down to the fact that I don't think it's anybody's business what I do or what I have for breakfast or whether or not I got laid last week or whatever.

RUBENSTEIN: *But on the other hand, it's perfectly possible to make stories about somebody eating breakfast or getting laid, that are not about you.*

GREGORY: Yeah, but with the gritty reality that makes people realize, Gee, this person actually does eat breakfast! A lot of people don't realize that people can be creative, that they can actually look at life and look at the way people respond to things, then create hypotheses with other characters to carry through. But what fun — I let things happen to Bitchy Bitch that I hope never happen to me! I think I can be awfully brutal sometimes! [laughter]

RUBENSTEIN: *I wanted to ask about sex and pornography and feminism*

GREGORY: Oh good.

RUBENSTEIN: *You were very involved with feminism — have you been following any of the debates in the women's movement or in academic feminism in the past ten or 12 years?*

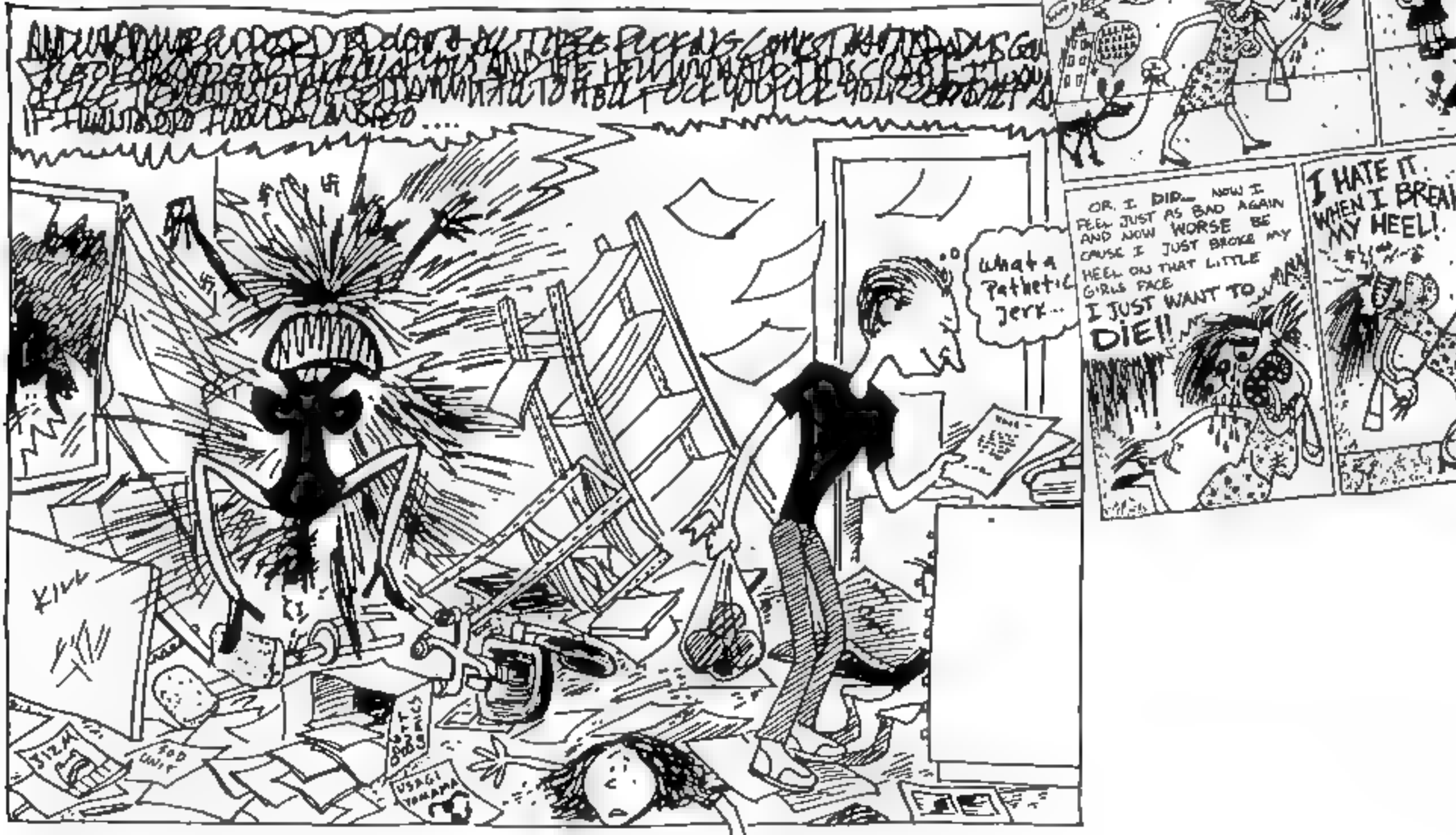
GREGORY: Not really

RUBENSTEIN: *Because I wanted to talk a little about the wars among or between women over pornography.*

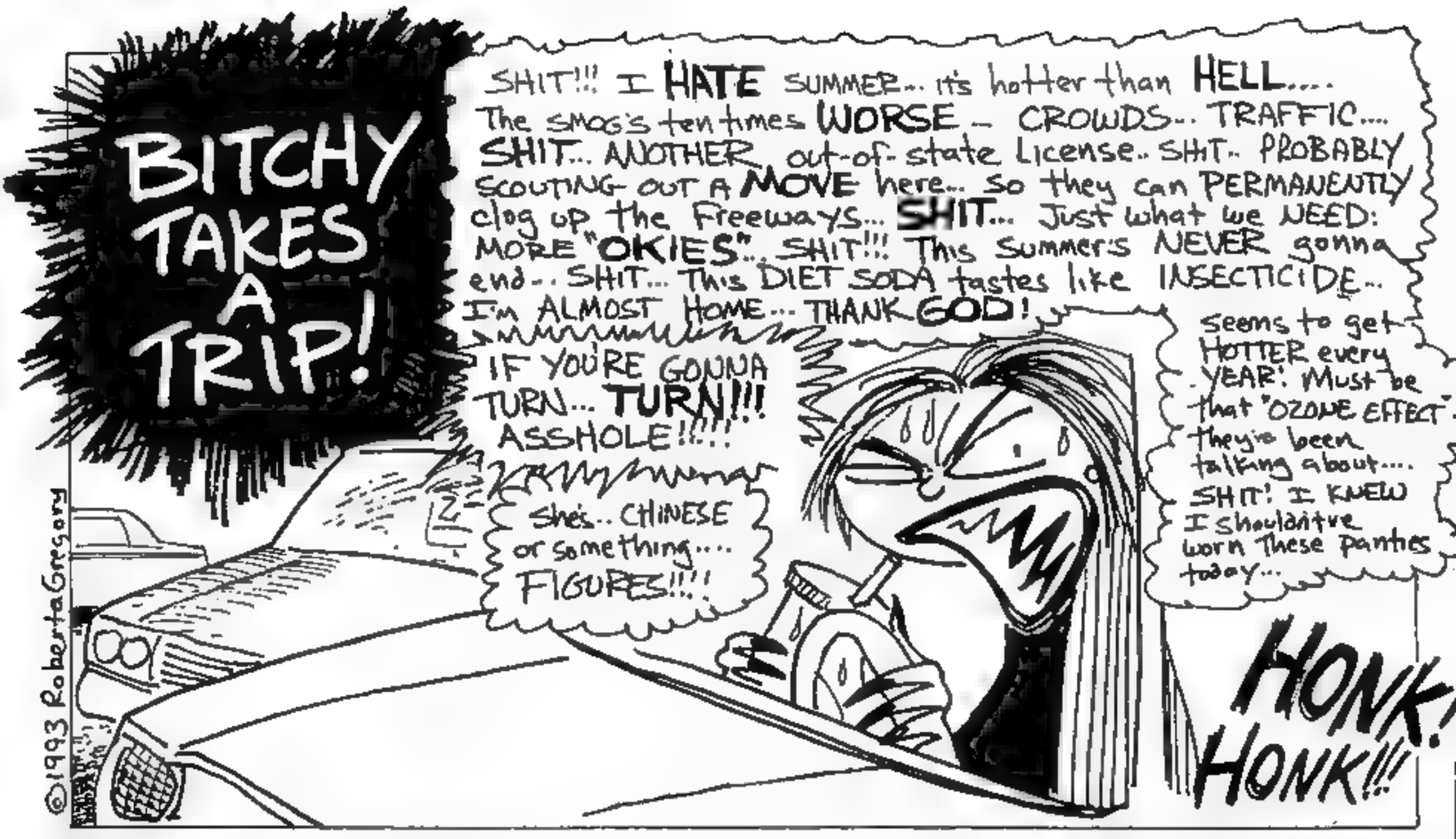
GREGORY: Alright! Note the rising excitement in my voice here!

RUBENSTEIN: *Who is your audience? Who do you imagine is reading this and what are your goals for your depictions of sex? Are you trying to make pornography, or are you trying to comment on sex without it being pornographic or do you have other goals in mind altogether?*

GREGORY: I want as wide a variety of people as possible to enjoy my work and get something out of it. I'm sure certain people are going to pick up on certain things and other people are going to pick up on other things and there's probably people who are going to get off on things that I'm probably going to be really disgusted that they're getting off on [laughs], but how can I control it? But *Real Girl* is a case in point. I did this story that appeared in *Real Girl* #5 but it was originally intended for *Real Girl* #3, it's this story about a woman whose lesbian friends are treating her really crappily because she now has a boyfriend. I was talking with Angela Bocage, the editor of *Real Girl*, about this story, and she said, "Well, put plenty of sex in it, I want it to be sexually explicit and I also want the comic to appeal to a really wide audience." So I was thinking, "Okay, here I've got a story about lesbians being absolutely shitty to one of their former friends because she's got a boyfriend," then in the original version of the comic, I have the woman going off with her boyfriend and they have sex and that's the end. I thought, "If I was a straight man who was picking up *Real Girl* because I wanted a wank book, what is the message I would be getting from this? I'm showing that lesbians are horrible people and they really resent this one friend of theirs for 'regressing' and then the woman goes off and she's consoled with normal hetero sex and they live



ABOVE: *Bitchy Bitch's first appearance, in* Graphic Story Monthly *#6's "War of the Muses", Bitchy pitches a fit in* Yours Truly Comix*'s "Bitchy Bitch Goes to Fantagraphics" (reprinted in* Naughty Bits *#1).*



happily ever after."

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, and on some level the structure of this story is, Yes, a woman really needs a man.*

GREGORY: Exactly. So I was thinking, I really don't think I can, in good conscience, present this story for a comic that a general audience is going to read because there probably won't be any other positive depictions of lesbians. No matter who I'm having sex with, I guess I'm a dyke at heart because I felt really protective. So I contacted Angela and said, "Tell you what. Let me write another version of the story which I think would probably fit better." That's the story "Queer" that appeared in *Naughty Bits* #3 in which the young woman meets her friends and they haven't seen her in a long time and they want her to come out and play softball with them and she's really evasive. So I showed that most of the fears were all in her head rather than her friends coming out and being nasty to her. They want her to be a part of this wonderful, supportive lesbian community. And that actually reflects more of my own life.

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, that seemed actually very real to me, both the fear and the fact that people would still be on some level inclusive, at least because people do move back and forth across all kinds of lines.*

GREGORY: Yeah, she was kind of playing the pronoun game and then her boyfriend comes over, they have sex, but there's an edge to it. I remember writing and drawing the whole story, then I showed it to Angela and she said, "Well, there's this one part I don't like that seems kind of slow." This is *Real Girl*, I'm getting $25 a page! But I said, "Okay," and I added a whole new page and did this massive rewrite. Then I showed it to her again and she said, "Well, I think I like the original version better, I'm not going to use this but I'm sure you can put it somewhere." I was really pissed off. So the story went into *Naughty Bits* #3 along with my little Roberta monologue bitching about Angela. Later I relented because, with issue #4, Angela told me she wanted to direct *Real Girl* more towards a queer audience. So I thought, "Okay now, I think I can live with this other story." So I resurrected the original version of the story which I now called "Queer Too" and drew it pretty much in the original format. It appeared in issue #5 and for some reason I feel regretful about that story. It seems kind of pointless, badly drawn. I think the fact that I penciled it a year before I finally got into inking it probably had a lot to do with it. I actually was kind of upset with myself for even putting the story in there, because I was thinking, "Okay, here's my 'radical' act," and I think first and foremost cartoonists should have a subversive streak and do things that people don't expect. So I was rubbing my hands together thinking, "I'm going to put a hetero sex scene in this all-dyke *Real Girl* comic and isn't that radical?" But when I actually looked at the comic with my story in it, I had this bad feeling — "This is really stupid, here I am sticking a hetero scene in some book that lesbians are going to pick up and expect to see something lesbian-oriented. Why did I do this?" So that's the first story I really had these serious doubts about, and I haven't been able to look at that comic since. I looked at it one time and just felt like a rat and put it back. I'm not sure exactly why..

RUBENSTEIN: *I had my doubts about the structure of the story, but what can you do? There's only so many ways to shape a story, and it reflects a reality.*

GREGORY: That's one of the few examples in which I actually let the concept of an audience dictate the content of the story and it just fell apart and was probably the most unsatisfying creative experience of my life. So there's a lesson in that.

Here's another idea about the audience: When I was doing *Artistic Licentiousness*, the original concept of the book was going to be a wank book. There would be this

TOP: *The odyssey of "Bitchy Takes a Trip" begins in* Naughty Bits *#10*
ABOVE: *Bitchy entertains herself in* Naughty Bits *#1's "Bitchy Bitch Gets Laid."*

story that cleverly showed all kinds of opportunities for sexual situations, like the guy's a cartoonist, the woman's a writer, so they put their sexual fantasies on paper and we see what goes on in their minds. But the only thing I didn't show explicitly in it was a lesbian sex scene. I don't know if you notice that as a glaring —

RUBENSTEIN: *Wasn't there almost one there and then it didn't happen?*

GREGORY: Yeah, it shows Denise and Tish kissing on the couch. On the next page they're sitting in bed together with their clothes off and Tish goes off to use the bathroom —

RUBENSTEIN: *Where she finds a condom, and says, "What's this? Eewwww!"*

GREGORY: Yeah. I show this explicit scene of Jennifer with Kevin's dick in her mouth, I show a penetration shot when Kevin and Denise are at it, I tried to make the book as graphically sexual as I could, but when it came to putting in a graphic lesbian sex scene, it just felt like a betrayal. There's plenty of bad porno comics, particularly the Eros variety, that show these uninformed hetero male versions of what they think lesbians do together. If some guy wants to look at what he thinks two lesbians do to each other, he can pick up *Submissive Suzanne* and jerk off all he wants.

RUBENSTEIN: *They'd be happier with representations of their fantasies rather than representations of the real thing anyway.*

GREGORY: Yeah, I felt like I'd be betraying every woman I've been in bed with by showing ... I kind of like it when I'm surprised by my reactions to things. "Okay, I have to have a graphic lesbian sex scene in it..." But I thought, there's just no way I'm going to! But of course *Artistic Licentiousness* is a total flop as far as a wank book

RUBENSTEIN: *It's almost subversive of the entire genre, because every sex scene in it is sex (except for the fantasy sex) that people don't quite want to be having or are having for reasons that aren't very clear to them. They're neither overwhelmed by mad passion nor by feelings of intense affection. Something else is going on there.*

GREGORY: But I remember this one review, I think it was in *Amazing Heroes*, and the comment was that the sex scene was "the most uncompromisingly realistic, graphic sex act he'd ever seen." And it sounds like it didn't do a thing for him. What does that prove? *Artistic Licentiousness* is in a way the work that's even closer to my heart than Bitchy Bitch, surprisingly enough. The second issue is all penciled — I want to get back to it one day!

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, it's a wonderful book, partly because there's a lot of bad sex in there or sex that isn't very good, and* nobody *shows bad sex. Sex, when we see it on TV or in movies or in comic books, it's always spectacular.*

GREGORY: Yeah, the women always have orgasms from penetration. I think in real life it's more like 20% of all women have ever come by being screwed by a man. In all the underground comics, it's 99%! I guess that's what guys want to think the reality is, because sexually explicit comics, because they're a visual medium, are pretty much geared towards men

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, it's pictures they want to see. It's possible for me to imagine comics that would be hot for women because it's possible to have a storyline, but then it's possible to imagine lots of things, I guess...*

GREGORY: I've never been really interested in visual sexual material, but then again I guess it's because I'm a woman

On Our Backs

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, what do you think of* On Our Backs *and* Taste of Latex*?*

GREGORY: I haven't really seen much of *On Our Backs*. I think there was a review of my comics in the January issue that I never got around to seeing because I was expecting them to send me a copy of it but they didn't. So what do I think of lesbian visual erotica? I guess if I wanted visual erotica, I'd draw my own. I think that's one of the good things about being an artist, the old, "if it doesn't exist, then I can make it up" concept.

RUBENSTEIN: *Outside of making a wank book, what the issues you were trying to deal with in your other representations of sex?*

GREGORY: It's hard for me to answer that because you say the word "issue," but I don't know if I consciously am thinking, "Okay, this is the book where I'm going to tackle racism." I have this concept of an ideal world where people understand each other and try to get along with each other and they appreciate people for who they really are

RUBENSTEIN: [singing] *Can you tell me how to get to Sesame Street?*

GREGORY: Well, I'm thinking of a sexual "Sesame Street." It's hard for me to grasp the concept of "goals" because I just get these ideas for stories and they're usually something that doesn't exist in the world of comics. I don't think I have a goal really. I just present what I think is a realistic picture of human beings or at least realistic from my perspective. I do actually know women who just hang out with lesbians, or I know people who are straight and they don't think they know any gay people. But the people I hang out with, I really don't know whether or not they're cruising a guy or cruising a girl and frankly I don't care. So I guess I... I can feel a goal forming here, bubbling to the top... So I guess I present a more balanced picture of life where people aren't so compartmentalized, a more balanced picture of humanity. I just do the comics I do because they're comics I'd like to see that don't exist. I think the more people who see people who don't dress like them or don't have sex like them or basically human beings with the same concerns... Let's just say I want to present a balanced picture of people.

RUBENSTEIN: *Back to the feminism thing. Have you run into criticism or trouble from people who say, "Good feminists don't draw dirty pictures"?*

GREGORY: Well, doesn't feminism indeed have a conflict with pornography? I really don't like pornography. I've been around [laughs] enough Eros comics —

RUBENSTEIN: *To put you off porn for life*

ABOVE: *' Bitchy Butch, the World's Angriest Dyke," roars to life in the British anthology* Dyke's Delight *#1*

"What do I think of lesbian visual erotica? I guess if I wanted visual erotica, I'd draw my own."

ABOVE: *Roberta Gregory, as seen through the eyes of (top) Colin Upton, from "The Battle of Fort Casey in* Big Thing *#2, and (bottom) Donna Barr, from her contribution to* The Comics Journal *#156's special Angoulême section, entitled "Angouleme Select Infernal Memories of Donna Barr."*
CENTER: *Bitch, bitch, bitch*

GREGORY: No kidding. But on the other hand, I know there are people who lump me into the same category as pornographers — my comics get seized at the Canadian border along with Eros comics.

RUBENSTEIN: *No kidding!*

GREGORY: Oh yeah! As a creative artist who deal with concepts that many people find disturbing and/or distasteful, and just plain things they don't want to be exposed to, I need to be just as vigilant about censorship as anybody. But on the other hand, I think some pornography is just crap. I'm resentful of the fact that there are people who, if they had their way, would close down the comic shop that sold *Naughty Bits*. But I don't think the other side of the coin is I should fight for the publishing right for every porn magazine that specializes in women tied up with come dripping off their faces.

RUBENSTEIN: *Or even if it has a right to exist, you don't have to refrain from criticizing it ferociously.*

GREGORY: It's a real quandary, because I think I probably am one of the most feminist women doing comics on a regular basis. It's hard for me to grasp the concept that there are women that also do alternative comics that think there's nothing wrong with showing women tied up with come dripping down their faces. As a matter of fact, they may be thinking, "Yeah, I wish that was me in the leather handcuffs and stiletto boots!" I don't know if I've really had enough direct dealings with feminism lately. How do you define feminism nowadays? There are so many definitions. Camille Paglia calls herself a feminist. Women Against Porn are feminists. Women put out *On Our Backs* and I'm sure they think of themselves as feminists.

RUBENSTEIN: *There are a lot of feminists out there.*

GREGORY: Yeah, but unfortunately, once you start talking about feminists, people who are not feminists think they know exactly what you're talking about — that these are women who hate men...

RUBENSTEIN: *And they don't shave their legs and they watch* Thelma and Louise *too often.*

GREGORY: I watched it about five or six times myself! And I don't shave my legs.

RUBENSTEIN: *Well, there you go, you must be a feminist!*

GREGORY: Yeah, or they think that feminists are women who are against any depictions of sex whatsoever. They think that feminists are enraged at women who stay home and take care of children rather than going out and being businesswomen. I've probably been a feminist for as long as anybody and I remember one of the first concepts we were dealing with was "wages for housework" — the concept that what women did at home was important and how can we arrange to get some kind of compensation for women who choose to stay home and take care of children? But that seems to have been erased from popular history the same way that *Pandora's Box* was erased from comics history. Nobody seems to remember that anymore.

RUBENSTEIN: *No, it doesn't fit anyone's idea of when things happened, so it* couldn't *have been there.*

GREGORY: There's also the fact that women never burned their bras! That's a total myth. I think there was a demonstration where women put bras in a trash can and that turned into the media phrase, "bra-burning feminist."

RUBENSTEIN: *I was at a historical conference a few years ago where somebody did a long, scholarly paper on the myth of bra-burning. The conclusion they came to was it didn't much matter — that if it hadn't been bra-burning, the media would have decided on something else. There had to be some way to demonize these women.*

Along with asking about your relationship with feminism, however broadly defined, I wanted to ask you about both the first and the second gay liberation movements. The second one being the one that we're in the middle of now.

GREGORY: We are?

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah. It's hard to say whether it's one continuous one, but at least from my perspective in New York is that there seems to have been one from the late '60s through the mid-'70s and there was another big boom about 1988, '89, that's still continuing.*

GREGORY: Good! One of the things I feel regretful about is that I concentrated a lot on alternative comics and I'd really like to do more comics that are geared more towards the gay community. Because *Gay Comics* always had a problem getting distributed through the gay community. It's still easier to buy it in your local comics shop than it is to find it in a local gay bookstore, from my understanding.

RUBENSTEIN: *Well, it definitely gets out there in our local gay bookstores. Have you been politically involved at all? Or has it just been that you've been a cartoonist and contributor that way?*

GREGORY: That's pretty much it. I think I'm sort of resigning myself to the fact that, from now on, my involvement is going to be creative, which I think is actually better than going out there knocking on people's doors, telling them to vote for the latest gay-friendly candidate.

RUBENSTEIN: *Yeah, that stuff gets old pretty quick.*

GREGORY: Yeah, one of the good things about being creative is that there is something new every day. Myself, I feel like I have this bottomless pit of potential stories, and your life is reborn with each project you work on. I definitely want to do more Bitchy Butch.

RUBENSTEIN: *That's right — tell the readers at home about Bitchy Butch.*

GREGORY: Oh yeah. Bitchy Butch, oddly enough, started out the same way as Bitchy Bitch, where she was this character that appeared provisionally because the story called for it and I thought I'd never see her again, but now she's taking on a life of her own. Bitchy Butch came about because I was corresponding with this lesbian cartoonist whom I guess will remain nameless, and she was interested in putting together an anthology of lesbian cartoonists. I think this was about the time I'd been working with Mike Dowers on *Artistic Licentiousness*, so I was encouraging her to go ahead with it. I gave her practical information, sent her the printers' estimates showing her it really didn't cost all that much to print a comic book. So she wanted to do one called *New Dyke*. She said it would be an anthology for "self-defined dykes" and I had sent her some copies of *Naughty Bits* which she enjoyed, so she asked if I would do a lesbian version of Bitchy Bitch. So I created the first "Bitchy Butch" story. I mailed it in to her, but she was not amused. I got this furious letter in reply saying that she couldn't use the story because it was based on all the lies and stereotypes that had been used to rape and kill dykes for centuries. This is almost a direct quote to the best of my memory. Further, she said that people were saying "that I was bisexual and not really a lesbian," so she ended the letter with the question, "Are you a dyke?" I was, you know, sort of taken aback at that, since I've always, I guess, thought of myself as a dyke. I defined it far beyond

just who somebody goes to bed with, which I've always had a real problem with all my life, you know, other people being so totally obsessed with what others did in the sack. Being "out" for all my adult life, over 20 years, and having gotten all the flack that entails, like nearly getting beaten up by men on more than one occasion over it, made me feel like I had pretty much paid any dues. Besides, I had just gotten a letter from a *Naughty Bits* reader who had said, "A dyke is a woman who is not dependent on men (or other women) for her emotional, physical, mental, financial, or general well-being." I thought that was just wonderful, certainly the kind of enlightened attitude I would like to expect from my readers. So I sent that quote in response, saying that this pretty much suited my definition of a dyke: one that transcended petty obsessions with other's sexual practices and gave a broader definition of human potential... I know I didn't word it totally like that, but you get the idea.

The short note I got in response said something like, "By self-defined dyke, I mean somebody that fits my definition of a dyke, which is a woman who has exclusive sexual and emotional relationships with women only, which means biological females," something just totally anal! And then the note just ended with, "So given that definition, are you a dyke?" And she signed it and that was that! Oh, I was so pissed off! I mean, talk about attitude! I managed to write a pretty civil response, along the lines of, "No, I'm afraid I don't fit your definition, and I'm willing to bet that the vast majority of the other contributors won't fit your definition either, although I'm sure you won't subject them to the same third-degree that you just inflicted on me." *New Dyke* never got off the ground, which was a real shame, since there *do* seem to be a lot of lesbians, and women in general, who are getting inspired to write and draw comics, but there's a glaring lack of women in decision-making positions, such as publishers. A new anthology would have been great, even though I guess I was forbidden to ever taint its hallowed pages.

I was a bit shaken and depressed over this, since I hadn't been in touch with the lesbian community for a while and it looked like it perhaps wasn't the same warm, fuzzy sanctuary I remember from about ten years ago. Or maybe that was just an East Coast attitude colliding with my lifelong West Coast laid-back-ness. It made me wonder just what sorts of things were being said about me. But the good thing was that I began to evolve lots of potential comics around this subject! The Bitchy Butch story ran in *Gay Comics* #15, and also in *Dykes Delight* in the U.K., where I had also sent the story before *Gay Comics* accepted it. Another Bitchy Butch story ran in *Gay Comics* #17 and the new issue, #21, has 19 pages of Bitchy Butch, including a story where Bitchy Butch and I have a heated argument over the finer points of sexual definition.

I think my saving virtue has been being able to see the humor or irony in such potentially painful or damaging situations, and then that's followed by just *floods* of story ideas, scripts, characters, and so on. I've recently characterized my "muse" as this pitbull dog with his teeth clamped to my ankle. So little time, so much to make into comics!

RUBENSTEIN: *What are your future plans?*

GREGORY: Of course there's plenty of *Naughty Bits* in the future. I think maybe the satirical possibilities of Bitchy Butch are probably even greater than Bitchy Bitch, if that's possible. I'd like to do more Bitchy Butch stories probably also in strip form, but of course I'd like to finish *Artistic Licentiousness*. Issue #2 is already penciled and ready to be inked. And the prototype story for *Artistic Licentiousness*, "A Dream Cum True," that I mentioned earlier, that's coming out in a comic called *Skunk*, from MU Press. The whole issue's kind of a slam on funny animal cartoonists. [*Skunk* is now available, and *Artistic Licentiousness* #2 will be out in June under a self-published imprint: "Comix Bitch."] In the Bitchy Bitch vein, Fantagraphics has collected some of the stories and put them into an anthology called *A Bitch Is Born*, which has just been released. That will probably expand the potential readership. A Bitchy Bitch strip has begun running monthly in a Seattle paper, *The Rocket*, and I hope to find other alternative papers that might be interested in it. So Bitchy Bitch may possibly be more visible than just the pages of *Naughty Bits*.

RUBENSTEIN: *That's great.*

GREGORY: I have to take my little characters and do what I can with them. I'm working with somebody on an animation project with Bitchy Bitch. The people from Colossal Pictures were in Seattle trying to scout up possible subjects for animation and they got a real big kick out of Bitchy Bitch and I think were on the verge at one point of selling it to MTV for *Liquid Television*. I guess the content of the little sequence I had, which was basically that she was wrestling with a tampax, must have freaked some of the guys.

RUBENSTEIN: [laughs] *Oh man, I would pay money to see that on MTV!*

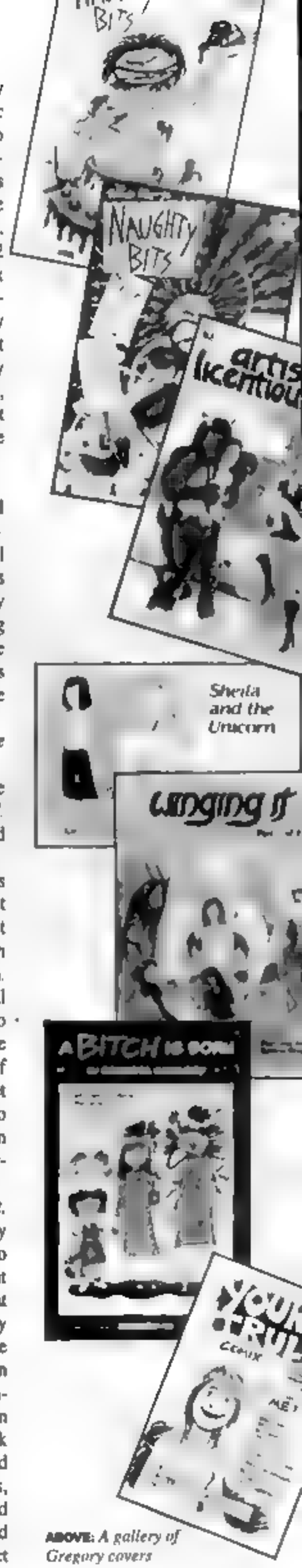
GREGORY: Yeah, I don't know. I don't think MTV is quite the place for Bitchy Bitch. MTV is *Beavis and Butt-head*.

RUBENSTEIN: *But you'd think if they could do* Beavis and Butt-head, *they could do tampax!*

GREGORY: About all I've seen of *Beavis and Butt-head* is about 30 seconds of it. But I did this little sequence and it was just awesome. People have read the storyboard of it and just howled with laughter, so I think Bitchy Bitch definitely needs to get moving in some way, shape or form. So this is a lot of enthusiasm but not a lot of practical resources, although I've had a lot of interest expressed, so we'll see. People that are involved in animation who are also Bitchy Bitch fans should contact me! That's kind of one of my pet projects, I've got a whole kennel of pet projects here! I actually know somebody who wants to do a performance art piece as Bitchy Bitch. She is a person who would be a perfect Bitchy Bitch with a few accouterments, and there you have her.

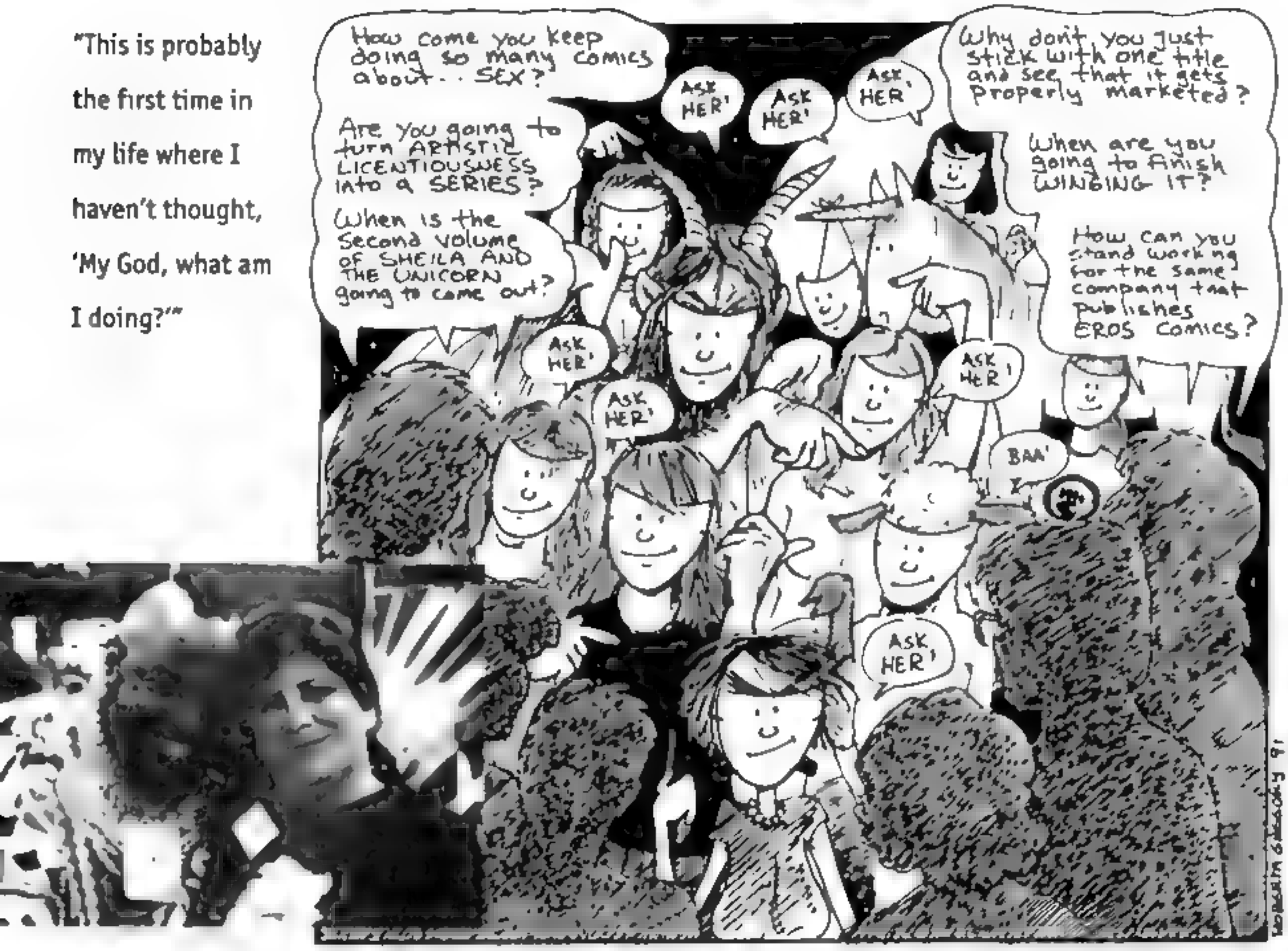
RUBENSTEIN: *So it's Bitchy Bitch multi-media. That's great.*

GREGORY: A lot of people said they'd been very inspired by her and she's something that really seems to stick to people, kind of like a burr! But beyond Bitchy Bitch, I want to finish *Artistic Licentiousness*. I'm not quite sure what format that's going to be published in, but that's a story that's pretty dear to my heart and a story that a lot of people are asking about. I definitely want to work more on *Winging It*, I've got some backup stories and some continuation stories and some plot twists with all the pantheon of characters from *Winging It*, and I actually read the book last night probably for the first time in about two years and I was just floored by it. [laughs] I don't know what it was, but I was just struck by how much of a story there is, and how much of it is really crying out to be finished and remembering what an overwhelmingly involving project



ABOVE: *A gallery of Gregory covers*

"This is probably the first time in my life where I haven't thought, 'My God, what am I doing?'"



it was back when I was working on it. It was amazing to go back about five or six years mentally to the time I was in the middle of this project. It's probably 180 degrees away from *Naughty Bits* but it's something that I could just plunge right into and pick up right where I left off, sort of like a friendship where you haven't seen somebody in several years and you get together and it's like, "So how did your mother's surgery go?" Sometimes just the vast panorama of creative projects that I could potentially be involved in kind of catches me off guard.

On my really outrageous wish list, I'd like to do comics that have to do with the environment. I'm actually doing one for this book edited by Shary Flenniken. I'd like to do comics for children, I'd like to do a lot more fantasy. I'm really very fond of fantasy but I don't really like the way it's done, which is usually something that triggers me off into doing something of my own the way I think it *should* be done. But I'm only one person! I guess right now I'm probably a lot more enthusiastic about future projects than I would have been maybe a year or so ago. This is probably the first time in my life where I haven't thought, "My God, what am I doing? This is really stupid, I'm putting all my energy into these comics that maybe three or four thousand people at the most read and I'm going to be really sorry one of these days." I actually had some good experiences at the San Diego convention this year, which makes me definitely much more enthusiastic about pursuing all of these projects than I would have been a few years ago

I guess part of the problem is, I'm concerned that people recently have become really fond of Bitchy Bitch and the whole *Naughty Bits* genre, and if I do something that's too different from it, will I find a publisher for it? But that's a bridge I'll need to cross — that sounds negative, you can leave that out!

RUBENSTEIN: *You can have one or two negative things in there*

GREGORY: I don't want to sound like I'm whining

RUBENSTEIN: *All the other cartoonists do it, why shouldn't you?* [laughs]

GREGORY: That's true. I have a right to whine, dammit!

RUBENSTEIN: *It's true, a lot of these interviews contain a little bitching. It seems to be part of the form somehow*

GREGORY: I feel like, if I'm bitching, I have nobody to blame but myself, because I knew this was not going to be the easiest way in the world to try to make a living. Twenty years ago I really had a strong interest to do nature art, pictures of landscapes, pictures of animals. I'd probably be making a good living right now doing cute baby cougars and wolf cubs for notecards.

RUBENSTEIN: *So what question have I missed?*

GREGORY: I could launch into this big tirade about why I don't think I'm getting as far in comics as a guy would, but it's probably all been said before, and I don't know if I have the energy for it. ●

ABOVE: *Gregory ducks responsibility on the cover of* Comics F/X *#19.*
RIGHT: *T Time! Gregory chums it up with Mr. T at the 1993 Chicago ComiCon (photo by Carole Sobocinski)*

A BITCH IS BORN!

This 96-page trade paperback explores the world of B tchy Bitch, Roberta Gregory's classic comic book character. It includes a brand new story, exclusive to this collect.on

"Not just strongly feminist, this reading is strong all over the place. . Cathol c guilt, politics, psycho humor, and pro choice."
—*Maximum Rock'N'Roll*

Send $9.95 plus
$2 00 shipping to.
Fantagraphics Books
7563 Lake City Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

SAVE the TOONS!

CARTOON ART MUSEUM

10th Anniversary Fun(d)Raiser
665 Third Street, Ste. 412
San Francisco, CA. 94107
(415) 546.3922 ☎
→thanks for YOUR support!!

COMIC CULTURE

Chris Claremont * Jim Shooter * Peter David * Scott Lobdell * Neil Adams * Peter Bagge * Louise Simonson * Dave Sim * Jeff Smith * Catherine Yronwode * Evan Dorkin * Harvey Pekar * Scott McCloud * Colleen Doran * Martin Wagner * Gilbert Hernandez * Jim Truman * Jill Thompson * Matt Wagner * Adam Pollina * Scott Harrison * Stan Sakai * Ann Nocenti *

The **BIGGEST** names.

The best creators.

The newest place to hear them talk.

A critical, intelligent look at comics.

The handbook for Quality.

It ain't Culture unless it's Comic Culture.

COMING YOUR WAY EVERY MONTH FOR JUST A BUCK!

* SEND $1 for a sample copy to

* COMIC CULTURE
P.O. Box 441
Roslyn Hts., NY
11577

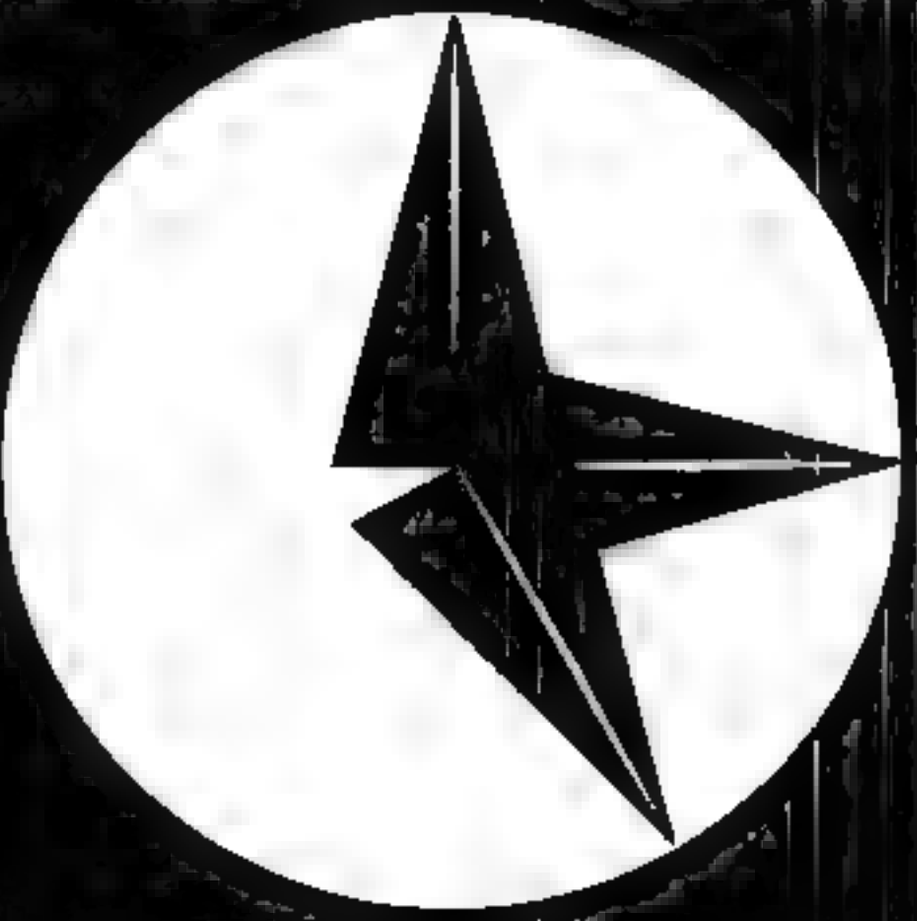
Star Clipper Books

Where The Hippest Characters Live

WRITE, CALL OR VISIT US FOR THE BEST IN COMICS
8143 Delmar Blvd • St. Louis, MO 63130
(314) 725-8801

Respective Characters Copyrighted James Owen, Jeff Smith, Jaime Hernandez, Dave Sim, Terry Moore, Scott McCloud, Larry Marder

The nu Age is coming...

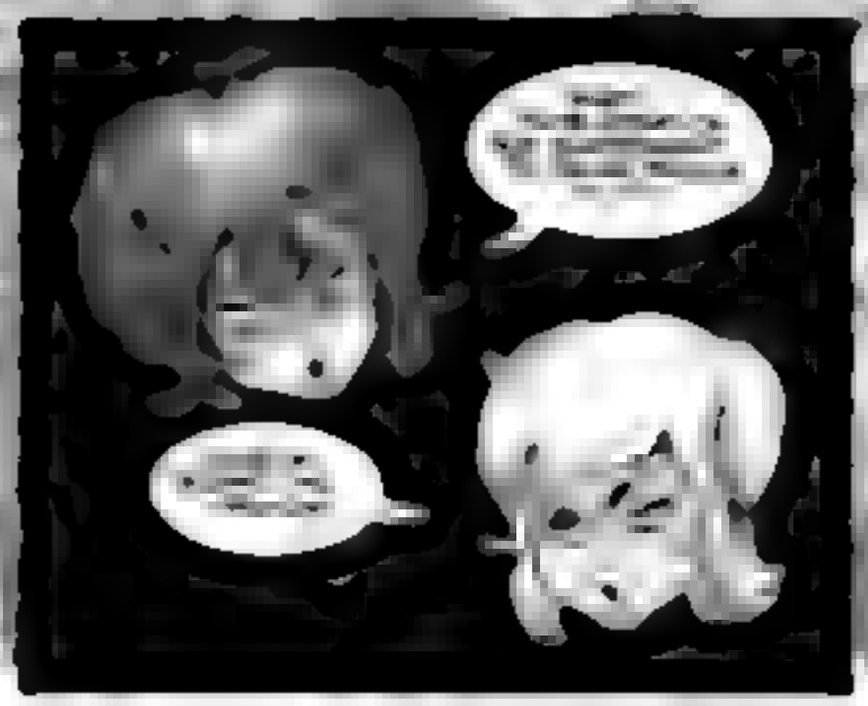


Dawning in January 1995!

PYRE

"The nu Age" © 1994 Tim E. Ogline

Wendy & Richard Pini



small one, in the comics industry

parts, each corresponding to the year in which it was performed

— The Editors

"I never did want to be the only source of [*ElfQuest* material]. It's always more fun to have other people playing in your sandbox."

PART ONE — 1993

CONRAD STINNETT: *For years you have gone along publishing at a fairly consistent schedule. Last year, 1992, you seemed to have just taken off*

RICHARD PINI: There are two metaphors. One of them is that of the 17-year cicada which hibernates for 16.99 of those 17 years and then "boom," it jumps out and starts doing its thing. The other metaphor is sex, which you can work at for a long, long time but eventually you achieve orgasm. I suppose that doesn't cast a very flattering light on the previous 14-and-a-half years of publishing.

WENDY PINI: I don't know, there is something to be said for foreplay.

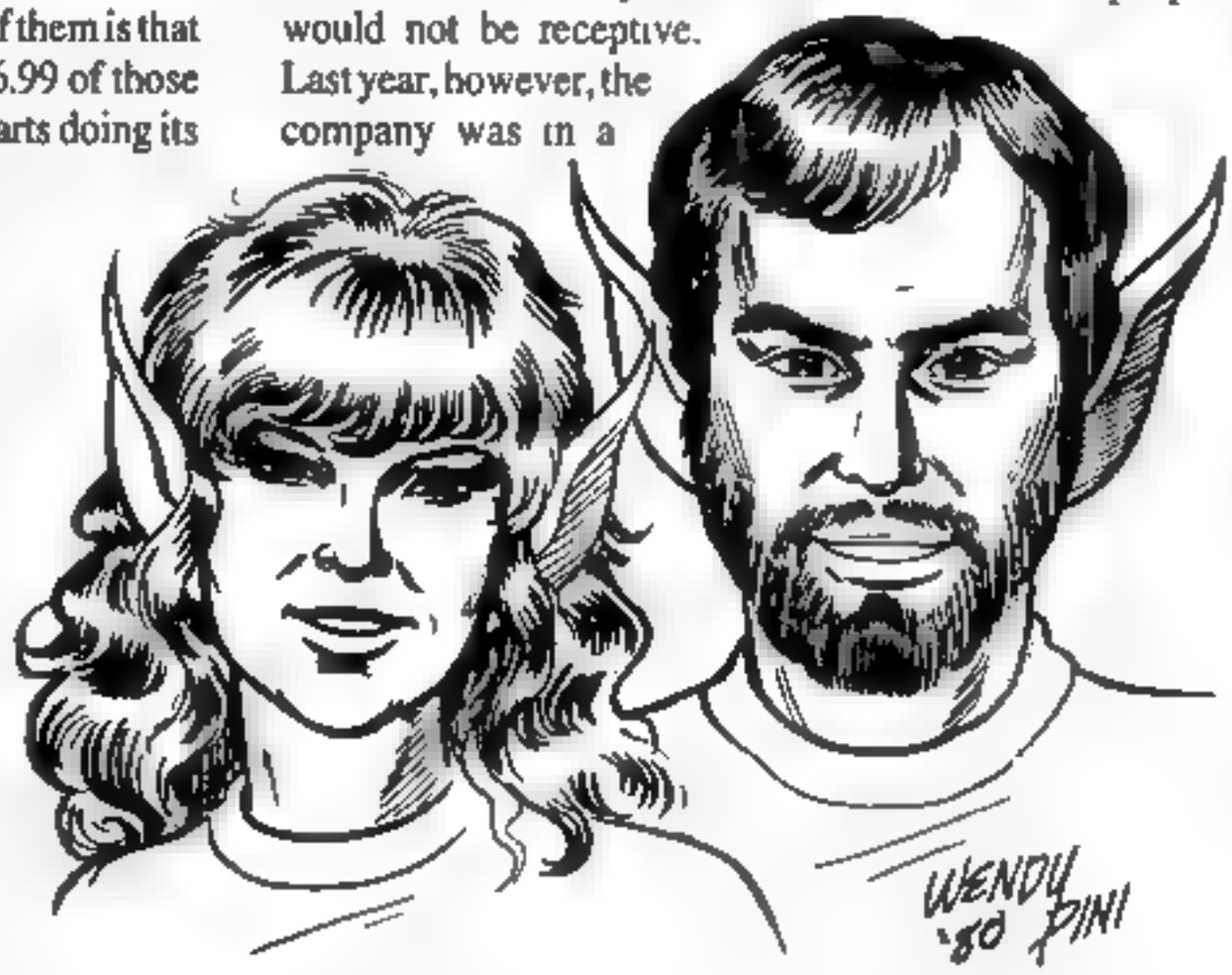
RICHARD: Well, there is something to be said for foreplay, but not masturbation.

WENDY: Lord, what a conversation. [laughter]

RICHARD: There is a perceptible sequence of events and impulses and feelings that leads to this growth. We began publishing in 1978, and for a whole long time we just did what we did, and it was comfortable and it was dependable. Recently, we began to see that, with respect to the comics industry itself, there were upheavals and rumblings from deep underground. There had been before; there was the big DC implosion and then there was the big black-and-white implosion. But this time, what happened is that Image and all the attendant brouhaha threw another spice into the stew pot, and that spice was the appearance that whether they existed in reality or not, there were big huge bucks to be made in comics and from the merchandising and licensing of comics.

There are more players, like at San Diego last August. I had never seen a San Diego like that, with people from outside companies coming around and talking to all the comics publishers, giving out cards, wanting to know what properties you had. Everybody is hungry just to get a piece of this pie. That's half of what's happening that we perceive. The other half is that *ElfQuest* has had two or three false starts in getting into media and into licensing. And we had been through a couple of rough experiences involving lawyers, which is always a rough thing. And we had grown enough as a business couple and creative couple to be able to sense when the timing is not so good and when the timing is good to do things. We were just finishing up, in 1992, a bit of legal business that was going to free *ElfQuest* up from a bad contract. As a result of that process, we got put in touch with some very good people. One of them works for Creative Artists Agency, which has a connection to a very hot-shot licensing agency here in the city [New York], who's done the Hanna-Barbera characters, who's doing *Dinotopia*. We sensed toward the middle of last year that the time was right to — I don't like to get mystical, but there were convergences.

WENDY: There is another factor. In the past we had tried now and again to have other artists and writers help us out and produce *ElfQuest* material, because I never did want to be the only source of it. It's always more fun to have other people playing in your sandbox. But the core readership of *ElfQuest* had for a long time seemed fanatically resistant to anybody else's art style or writing style; they wanted Wendy and Richard, they wanted the way we told the stories, they wanted the way I drew the characters. And for a long time, I would have to say that we even felt a little intimidated by that, we felt that it might be too much of a risk to start putting out a line of books drawn by other artists and written by other writers. We felt that people would not be receptive.



Last year, however, the company was in a position to take a risk.

RICHARD: We were in a position to be able to take some risks, plural. It had been a very good year for us businesswise while the rest of the country was thrashing in recession.

WENDY: I think people turn to fantasy for entertainment when the economy is in trouble. So we had a boom year.

RICHARD: It was a synergistic process, because as we were extricating ourselves from the bad comic legal thing, we had the expectation that once we were free, we would be able to go with Creative Artists and this other licensing group called The Beanstalk Group. And these were the first hard-core, go-get-em, shark-like professionals we had been able to hook up with who had the resources and the savvy and the contacts to push *ElfQuest*.

We knew that this had a better than ever chance of happening. We realized that, if that happened, then there was going to be an awareness of *ElfQuest* unlike any that we'd ever had before, and a need for artwork for packaging purposes and advertising purposes, and whatever purposes, that Wendy couldn't possibly fulfill. That's why I made the command decision to go to the second title, which was *New Blood*, and put out the invitations. Because we'd had a good year, I also had surplus capital to be able to pay new creative people because, if nothing else, Warp Graphics was going to be regarded as a company that pays on time and pays competitively. So that was the genesis of *New Blood*. We'd already made a decision to go color earlier in the year as a result of seeing the monstrous fluctuations in the market and realizing that black and whites were going to take a beating.

WENDY: Oh, yeah, the black-and-white alternative market is practically dead right now —

RICHARD: — unless you have got that core like *Cerebus* or *Love & Rockets*, and I can't off the top of my head think of any others that are attracting an audience now. There are very good black-and-whites, make no mistake, but they're not getting the numbers that you would hope that they would...

PREVIOUS PAGE, LEFT: *Elfkids from* ElfQuest: New Blood *#10 (art by Gary Kato).*

PREVIOUS PAGE, RIGHT: *The fabled castle of the High Ones, from the original* ElfQuest, *book four*

ABOVE: *A Pini portrait of Wendy and Richard, from their interview in* The ElfQuest Gatherum, *volume one*

STINNETT: *What was the reaction of the readership to the move to color?*

WENDY: Interestingly, the older fans basically said to us, this is great, this is the way we've envisioned *ElfQuest* all along, more and more and more. And I think that any of the newer readers that came more or less took it for granted that a comic book should be in color

RICHARD: The *ElfQuest* fans loved it because they love to see the colors. They previously had to wait a year for the graphic novels to get color, and some of them liked the graphic novel color and some of them didn't like the graphic novel color because some of them thought it was very nice and subtle, some of them thought it was too garish, and some of them thought that it wasn't bright enough. You're not going to please the world.

To be blunt, we didn't see massive increases in our sales because of the color. And I attribute that more to *ElfQuest* momentum than anything else. *ElfQuest* is perceived as having a very well-defined audience. I don't happen to agree with that perception. I think *ElfQuest* can be read and enjoyed by a heck of a lot more people than it's currently reaching, but it's been doing what it's been doing for 15 years, so why should anybody who's been not been buying *ElfQuest* for 15 years suddenly pick it up because it's color? There's that inertia. So another thing that we did in '92, and we're doing even more in '93, is promotion, advertising, in your face. I mean, look at us, we're here

WENDY: Elf-awareness. And it goes back to what I was talking about earlier, that we are doing the oddest product in the comics market right now. The fact that we're holding our own is phenomenal. Because, if you look at what is out there, we're fighting against people hitting each other in the face, and muscles and death and blood and gore and Wolverine and all of that. This is what the basic comic book audience in the country is buying, and your basic comic book reader is a 14-year-old adolescent who isn't sure of his sexuality and who likes to hit people.

STINNETT: *I think you are doing a very interesting experiment here with the expansion of the* ElfQuest *universe*

RICHARD: Well, I had a little bit of a mentor in Jim Shooter. Think what you will of the man, he's uncanny. Everywhere he's gone he's done an innovative thing. Personality-wise, he may not have been able to stay where he has gone, but creatively, I think he's a powerhouse. And I think he's a very savvy guy. I don't know if you have been following the Valiant titles, but you have to be able to see a shift from the Shooter-overseen titles to the non-Shooter-overseen titles. And I think something has been lost.

Now, I used to go there and visit from time to time and we'd sit and talk about the business of comics. And this was back when *Harbinger* had just started, *Rai* had just started, *Magnus* and *Solar* had been out for, oh, maybe four or five months, they had four titles, and Jim was talking about what you need to go head to head in this market. He said you need a certain "critical mass" of exposure. He was talking about eight or so titles and how once they achieved eight regular titles they would always be there, they would have this constant reader awareness. And I took that very much to heart because, at that time, I was thinking about *New Blood*. We just had the one *ElfQuest* title and all these other things weren't even dreams yet. But it inspired me. If *ElfQuest* wants to be taken seriously in this market — and we're already being taken very seriously in the book market, but comics is still going to be the freaks about continuity, for example, that Marvel is. Ever since Roy Thomas got his hands on the idea of continuity it's been a holy grail for writers, and I think it's a perverse one.

WENDY: I think one of the neat things about the *New Blood* part of what I like to do — then we need to think about expanding the line. *New Blood* was the first shot in that.

Wendy had another idea for a character called Jink. Jink is in the future but it takes place on the same world, and we are going to play a little bit cute with the idea that maybe there are some of our present-day *ElfQuest* characters still alive on this world 10,000 years in the future. Jink is the only one that we know about, and she's not going about trumpeting that she's a descendant of elves. She has the powers and she does interesting things with them, but she wants to keep a low profile.

STINNETT: ElfQuest: The Next Generation?

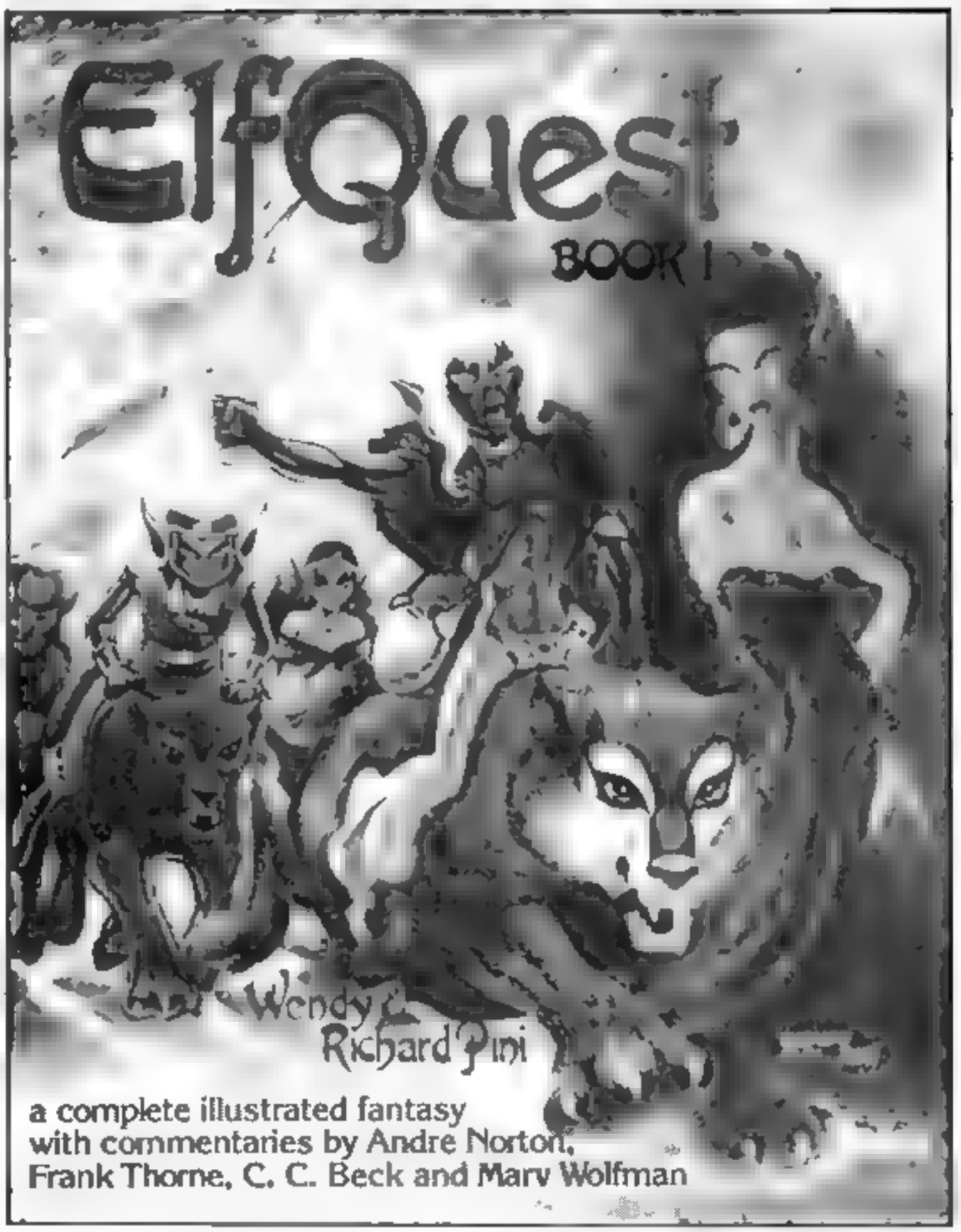
WENDY: There you go, that's a good name for it.

RICHARD: Well, with that we're moving from a more fantasy milieu into a science fiction milieu.

WENDY: Although *ElfQuest* always did have a heart of science fiction.

RICHARD: Right, the undercurrents were always there, so it's not like a break, it's just an extension with a different emphasis. But we're going to try our damnedest to keep *ElfQuest* small and intimate and contained and we're not

"People turn to fantasy for entertainment when the economy is in trouble. So we had a boom year."



ABOVE: *The cover from the first color* ElfQuest *collection*

"There are two extremes to be avoided: anything goes, and canon is canon and that's it."

title is that it's like a training ground for new artists and writers because we're letting *New Blood* be non-canonical, or, as Richard likes to call it, "loose-canon." So there are a lot of things that we let pass in the storytelling in *New Blood* that Richard and I would not do ourselves for any actual *ElfQuest* stories. But we're just letting people feel their way around in the *ElfQuest* universe. And that way we can get a look at what these people can do, and see if there is a more canonical-type story that would fit their skills.

The team I'm working with now on *Hidden Years*, the team that's picking up with issue six of *Hidden Years*, Paul Abrams, Charles Barnett, and Sarah Byam, have all been familiar with *ElfQuest* to one extent or another since they were kids, which makes me want to run for the Geritol.

Paul and Charles, their first work for us as a team was in *New Blood* doing a semi-canonical *ElfQuest* story, and it was 85 percent there and we just looked at this team and said, "We can get them 100 percent there." And that's what led us to kind of nurture them along to be our regular *ElfQuest* artists.

RICHARD: John Byrne wrote a letter into the *Comics Buyer's Guide* and made reference to something that I agree wholeheartedly with. Conan Doyle wrote Sherlock Holmes and then he wrote some more Sherlock Holmes because his fans wouldn't let him kill the character But Spielberg did a story that could not have happened; he had young Sherlock Holmes meet young Watson, which is flatly impossible within the rules. I still thought it was charming You can take that way too far, though, so I think there are two extremes to be avoided: anything goes, and canon is canon and that's it. I think there are very good ideas for stories that could happen within the *ElfQuest* universe and use the *ElfQuest* characters that cannot possibly really happen, but they're just great stories.

WENDY: Another thing that happened last year that never happened before was that artists and writers started surfacing that we never really knew were around before, saying "I have been reading *ElfQuest* since I was a kid and I always wanted to write a story and draw a story." And we reacted like, "Where have you been all these years?"

ABOVE: *Rayek, Leetah, and Cutter, the love triangle that drives the plot of* ElfQuest, *book one.*

RICHARD: This comes back to that element of timing. We would not have been in the psychological position —

WENDY: Or financial

RICHARD: — to give work to other people before 1992. Now we want to employ people, we can afford to employ people, we in fact need to employ people. It's very much a snowball effect. Once you open the door to people, then you have more material that you need for your present publishing, so you need to schedule more projects, which eventually means you need more people.

WENDY: Which means you hire a new managing editor.

RICHARD: You hire people to help you out here in the office in addition to on the outside. So ultimately we end up with *Sea Elves, Ten Chiefs, New Blood, Hidden Years, Jink.*

WENDY: *Rebels.*

RICHARD: *Rebels.* There are six titles right there.

STINNETT: *Wendy, will you be overseeing a lot of projects then?*

WENDY: Well, right now I have been putting a lot of focus on getting this first team effort among Paul and Charles and Sarah out. This issue really has to hit with a bang, this one really has to please the hardcore *ElfQuest* fans because I want them to get to know and love Paul and Charles and Sarah the way they know and love Richard's and my stories. So, if anything, I've really been standing over the three of these people with a very gentle whip, you know, we go over — we got Sarah a fax machine, Paul already has a fax, and Charles lives near Paul, so we're all in constant communication. Every day faxes are going back and forth, Paul sends his layouts and I approve them, and then the pencils get done and they go to Charles and Sarah. We talk script and story and it's a very intense relationship right now. We're all coming together. It's a very close team. And the thing that I'm discovering that makes it a dream team is that everybody has the same kind of spirit or the same kind of attitude about working on *ElfQuest*. There is a lot of love going on there, a lot of real genuine feeling for what they're doing, and they're all really giving the best that they have got.

STINNETT: *What kind of reactions have you had from fans so far over an* ElfQuest *series not directly done by you?*

RICHARD: The response has been overwhelmingly, but I couldn't say unanimously, positive.

WENDY: Such a relief

RICHARD: We got a few letters from people who just said, "It ain't Wendy and Richard, I don't want to have anything to do with it." And unfortunately, our response has to be, "Sorry, bye," because even when we were doing exactly what we wanted, all of it ourselves, we still couldn't please everybody

WENDY: No. How can we?

RICHARD: And pragmatically, the only thing that we can say to these people is if you leave you're going to miss some unbelievable stuff. Most of the people who have written in have said, "Well, it's not you two guys, but it's interesting, I like it, I like it a little bit, I really like it."

STINNETT: *The only comparison I can see for this is Howard Chaykin's* American Flagg *in the '80s, when Chaykin left and the new teams came on, but I think the fact that you're maintaining a presence, saying, "We're here, we're the*

keepers of the overview, ElfQuest *is important to us, we're not backing off" is important.*

RICHARD: You know, I can go you one better. I was collecting *Spider-Man* from day one and Steve Ditko was Spider-Man. Then he stopped and John Romita took over and it was like running into a brick wall. I'd never paid attention to artists before, but this was the first time I could see the art style on a character change radically, and I was dismayed a little bit at first. I was unsettled. But then I just kept going because I liked reading *Spider-Man* and eventually I got used to John Romita. And then, of course, I came to understand that there is a factory over there and there are 500 artists, any one of whom can draw Spider-Man as long as he looks reasonably like Spider-Man. And that's what we're going for with *ElfQuest*: as long as it's reasonably — our definition — like *ElfQuest*, it works.

WENDY: As long as the characters are recognizable. We have had to have artists change some of the panels they have sent us, even for *New Blood*, because it was just too far afield from what the characters look like. They have to be recognizable. They can be in someone else's style, but you have to be able to look at a character and say that's Cutter, or that's Skywise.

RICHARD: This is the pitfall of a very personal long-running vision. Nowadays in the mainstream it doesn't matter. You have, what, seven or eight simultaneous and quite different interpretations of Superman or Batman on the stands at a given moment, and consistency doesn't matter. We need to get to that point, and we're just nibbling at the edges of the transition. But it's going to happen. Because, on the canonical title, the team is doing very well. Yeah, we'll get our share of complaints. "Oh, you have quit, you have sold out, you have done this, that, and the other..."

WENDY: However, I have to interject that Charles was down in South Carolina over the holidays and he was in a store, signing. Charles is the inker and he had some of the pages he was working on, and he said at one point a girl with a big wolf on her tee shirt came into the store and the clerk took her over and said, "Hey, guess what? This is one of the new artists on *ElfQuest*." And the girl went through the roof, and looked at the artwork and Charles said, "How do you think we've done?" And she said, "Well, it's not quite Wendy's, but it's wonderful." That was very encouraging to hear.

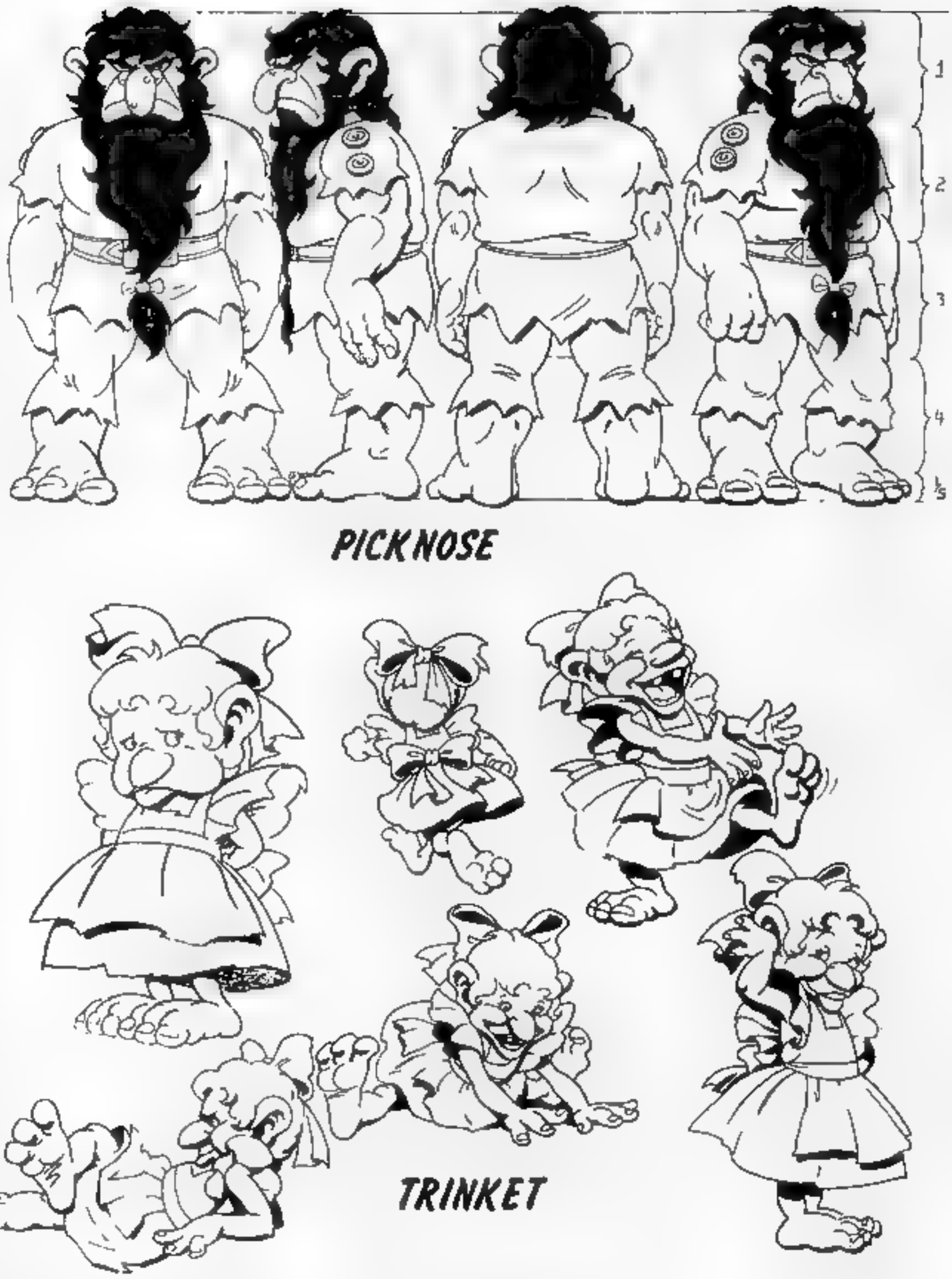
STINNETT: *As opposed to a Marvel or a DC where it's the factory, it's always been known there are the two of you out there, so I think you are making a transition and it's very unsettling.*

RICHARD: It's unsettling for us. It's unsettling for them. But all that we ask of people is they continue to grant us the trust in our ability to work with new people that they have given us over the years for what we ourselves have done. It is very irritating to have people say to you for 15 years, "I love what you do, I trust you to continue doing what you do," but also to say, "I don't trust you to extend that vision to anyone else." Five percent of me understands where they're coming from, the other 95 percent wants to pound them in the jaw. But, that's one of the joys of being a self-contained company.

WENDY: I don't think there is any greater joy or real literal fun than having other people play in your sandbox and put their own creativity into what you have started to build. It's like taking a bucket full of sand and putting it down and saying, "O.K., that's what I did, now what can you do?" And somebody comes and builds something along the side there and somebody else digs a hole here, and the universe starts to grow out.

STINNETT: *Well, things are growing, new projects are happening... Will you two still be saying, "We have got a story to do — let's do it like the old days"?*

RICHARD: You should have been here last night. We were talking earlier in this interview about what's happening in



ABOVE: *Model sheets drawn by Wendy for an aborted Saturday morning animated* ElfQuest *series on CBS.*

"Right now, from where I'm standing, I would say you have a snowball's chance in hell of starting your own little company out of your garage and surviving."

comics and the drive to sell millions of comics to comics readers. It's very interesting watching the business. Do you read *Wizard*?

STINNETT: *Occasionally.*

RICHARD: In issue #17 there was an interview with Dave Sim. And in issue #18 there is an interview with us. And because *Cerebus* and *ElfQuest* go back as long together as they do, and they're the only two that do, there has been, I think, an industry-wide, unconscious impulse to link *Cerebus* and *ElfQuest*, to group the two. After a very short time from day one of publishing, *Cerebus* and *ElfQuest* began to grow apart in terms of the philosophy of what being an independent publisher means and what comics are all about. And so right now we're a good distance apart and I don't see that either one of them is invalid. There's Dave's philosophy of publishing and my philosophy of publishing, if you want to personalize the companies. But in Dave's recent interview in *Wizard*, he was talking about what's happening with Image, and he is saying that this is great for comics — I'm paraphrasing, I hope I don't misquote or mischaracterize — saying that this represents a new evolutionary step in what comics are going to become. He points out that everyone is saying Image Comics is a fad, that back in 1961 DC looked at Marvel Comics as a fad, and so on and so forth. There is an element of logical incorrectness in there. Marvel is only seen as a powerful force in retrospect. You don't see a powerful force from within it. And Image acknowledges privately, at least the people that we've heard say this do, that they're not going to be around in a year. They are hitting the market for the bucks now and then they will go on to do something else. They're already doing it. So Dave's philosophy of comics and publishing is correct, but I think it's small and I think it's narrow. He's doing what he's doing; his vision is laser sharp with *Cerebus*. He will do his 300 issues and at issue 300 he will have the same audience and the same numbers that he has now, because his vision, his approach, is laser sharp. Lasers are great for burning holes, little well-defined holes, through obstacles. That's how I characterize him. It's not a slam. He's very intense, very focused, very illuminated in a small area. That's not me. I want to be a flood lamp. I don't want to burn holes through the walls of people's perceptions, but I want to illuminate a lot of territory.

Now we're going to get back to the question you asked. What we're doing besides comics... You already know that we have done a lot of business in bookstores with the graphic novels since 1981. We have been talking about doing children's books. We'd had the idea, the seed, for a while, but we were at a sales meeting for Berkley Publishing, who distributes our graphic novels, and more than one of the sales reps there said, "We can move a lot of young adult, juvenile, children's books kind of things, about the size of Golden Books, maybe $4.95, $5.95 price tag, 40 pages For young readers." So Wendy and I went to dinner last night and we were sitting over the table, as we had so often done in the past, but had not done real recently because of all of the turmoil, and Wendy had the idea for a story involving the *ElfQuest* characters and a young human girl. You had the idea for the story —

WENDY: Yes, I had the skeleton and I was writing it in a kind of stream of consciousness way. I didn't really know exactly what all the motivations were, but I could sort of see which direction the story was going. And Richard asked me if this was something I wanted to continue with on my own, and I said, "By no means, I will tell you what I've got so far and we'll see what you think." And all of a sudden we were back in the old days. I told him what I had, and his wheels started turning, and he gave his input into the little girl's motivations and pretty soon we had a story. The basic theme is going to be how your own creativity can be your way of surviving no matter what your environment tells you is impossible. Or how your environment puts you down. Your own creativity is the one thing they can't take away from you.

RICHARD: You have a spark, everyone has a spark, and that's yours, and that's priceless.

WENDY: And we're sitting there choking up. I mean, it looks like —

RICHARD: For some time, because I have been going crazy with *New Blood* and Wendy has been going crazy finishing up *Hidden Years* and then dealing with the new creative team, we haven't had the opportunity to sit down and have a good, old-fashioned story skull-banging session. And I don't know about you, but I was beginning to mourn the possibility that we might grow apart creatively and become two administrators

WENDY: There is no question.

RICHARD: As creative as we might be individually with our own teams and with our own concerns, we wouldn't be doing a story bang, bang, bang — and last night it just came back in a big rush and it felt great.

STINNETT: *There are a lot of dedicated* ElfQuest *fans out there that would be happy to know that*

RICHARD: We're not giving up Warp as a creative entity. We're just trying to get Warp Graphics, Incorporated, acknowledged as a legitimate comics company. I mean, I don't want to go head to head with Marvel. The hell with them. We have a niche that we're trying to fill that they're not addressing, that nobody else in comics is addressing. We're addressing it, and if no one else does that, fine, that's less competition. But Warp is a creative thing we don't intend ever to let go.

WENDY: Exactly. And this is a good point to introduce the fact that just in the comics shops the nature of our audience is different from what's out there buying the superhero comics. *ElfQuest* still has the highest female readership of any comic book being published right now

RICHARD: On a percentage basis, anyway

WENDY: On a percentage basis. I mean excluding *Barbie*. For a series that's not aimed specifically at women, we have a huge percentage of women making every effort to buy it, whether it's in comic shops where they don't feel particularly welcome, to Waldenbooks or B Dalton or the big chain bookstores. And that makes a big difference in how the product is received and who reads it and who it gets passed to and so forth.

STINNETT: *One thing I wanted to touch on was, who reads* ElfQuest*? I know there is a large readership out there. I know it's been an ongoing concern in getting the readers to want to go into a comic shop to buy* ElfQuest*, or even getting comic shops to make a commitment to carry*

ABOVE: *Family fun from the second elf series,* ElfQuest Siege at Blue Mountain *#1*
OPPOSITE TOP: *The Wolfriders screw things up inside the Blue Mountain in* ElfQuest*, book three*
OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *High drama at the climax of* ElfQuest*, book four*

ElfQuest.

RICHARD: It's a tough nut to crack because we're not selling in *Spawn*-like numbers. Now, *Spawn* is not being sold one copy to one reader. We all know that there aren't that many comics readers in the country, and the number of comics readers now is a pale shadow of what it was in the 1950s and the 1940s, before TV. So we're not selling in *Spawn*-like numbers, we don't have the feeding frenzy, the piranhas coming into the comic shops wanting to buy ten and 20 copies of a given issue, obviously for reading purposes.

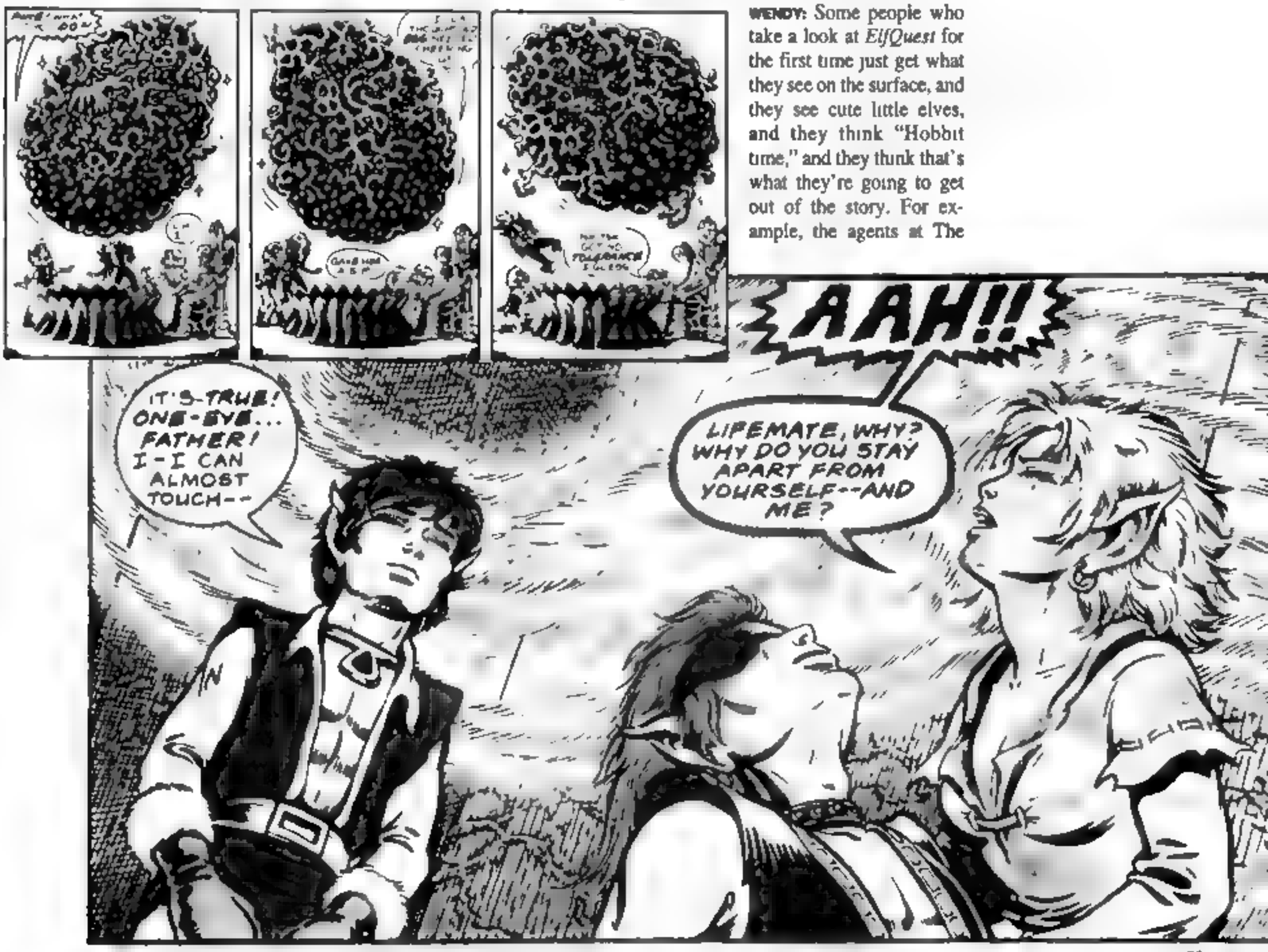
WENDY: All we have to do is give Cutter retractable claws and a cape and kill somebody every issue.

RICHARD: Right. So *ElfQuest* doesn't have that built-in investment market hook, which is a paper hook anyway because it can't survive, it can't last. But a store owner, if he knows he's got five *ElfQuest* fans, he is going to do one of two things. He is either going to put five copies on the order form without even thinking every time it comes time to order *ElfQuest*, or he is going to say, "I need to buy five more *Youngbloods*, all right, let's lose two *ElfQuests*, two *Cerebi*, and one *Bone*," just slice them up, because his budget is fixed. And then he orders three copies, and for whatever reason two don't come in, so he says screw it. So he goes away, and we've lost him as a store owner. We're trying our damnedest to make every store owner... now there are people out there, if we can get them interested, they will buy something, they will buy our books or maybe they will buy somebody else's books, too. But the direct market is not our foundation anymore. Our foundation is the bookstores. Now, you get a different audience walking into the bookstores than you do walking into comic shops. You already know who the audience is that walks into the comics shops. You get 12-year-old boys in the comic shops, and you get a wide spectrum of people in the bookstores.

We did a survey some years ago, and I don't believe that the statistics or the demographics have changed very much. Our readership — the age range is very wide. We get everybody from eight-, nine-year-olds on up through to college and young adulthood. We get young parents reading *ElfQuest* to their kids. The majority of our readers are post-pubescent, high school, junior high school, but it's such a spread, I almost hate to say that, because it might seem that then I can't include college age, but yeah, they're there too. Every age group that reads *ElfQuest* gets a different message; young readers get a fantasy fairytale adventure story, older readers get the psychological stuff that we're putting in there, the messages. Fifty percent of our readership is women.

"The direct market is not our foundation anymore. Our foundation is the bookstores."

WENDY: Some people who take a look at *ElfQuest* for the first time just get what they see on the surface, and they see cute little elves, and they think "Hobbit time," and they think that's what they're going to get out of the story. For example, the agents at The



"This is not an industry that is going to take care of you emotionally. This is not an industry that's going to open its arms to you and say, 'Come on in, there is always room for more.'"

Beanstalk Group who are now pushing *ElfQuest* for toy licensing and so forth, took their first look at *ElfQuest*, and they didn't quite know what to make of it. Then they read it, and the reaction was, "I had no idea, I really like these stories. Can I have more?"

RICHARD: Also, it's intimidating, especially if you are coming upon *Elfquest* for the first time. You've got these eight, now nine color books, huge, serious poundage of reading here. And you flip through it all and every page is color and every page has meaningful stuff on it. A lot of what we have been doing with both the children's books and our presentations to media and licensing people is to put a new, more accessible face on *ElfQuest*. Now that the characters are in a Middle Ages setting, we can take them places and we can introduce things that we never could before, and at the same time we can essentially start fresh.

WENDY: This new presentation is what the Beanstalk guys are taking to that big electronics fair in Las Vegas that's going on right now.

RICHARD: And their first attempt is going to be to see if they can get *ElfQuest* into video games, home computer games. And I think they have an excellent shot.

STINNETT: *You have been talking for years about a movie, too.*

RICHARD: The reason we have been talking for years is that *ElfQuest* started out designed for animation. We're both fans of animation, we were fans of comics at the time, and it seemed the logical progression, that we grew up on animation, we knew what animation can mean when it's good, and we wanted to see these characters move some day. So every nibble that came along regarding animation, we jumped at, and we talked out loud about it. Which in retrospect may not have been the smart thing to do, but we were very enthusiastic. Readers do not forget what we say!

WENDY: One of the things that we have learned is that getting a major motion picture, for example, *The Rocketeer*, based on your product, is not necessarily what you think it is.

RICHARD: But there are so many ins and outs to the process that we have since almost given up talking about it. When a fan comes and says, "What's happening with the movie?" We say something to the effect of, "Look Making a movie is not nearly as easy as you might think it is. We are talking with the right people, they are talking with the right people, it's a very complex process." And, as Wendy said, it's not what you think; what has *The Rocketeer* done for Dave Stevens? All right, he was listed as co-executive producer, he got to be blown up, but what has it done for him lately? What has that done for his ongoing dreams or career?

So we have changed our direction lately to say — and you have probably read this in some of the editorials we put out — "Listen. If a movie never happens, that's not a bad thing. We've still got all of our stories and all of our plans." It's just that the time seems now very, very right for a Creative Artists Agency, for a Beanstalk Group to come into our lives, and to shepherd this for us. So it's a very exciting time to be Warp Graphics.

WENDY: Another element is that we ourselves have released psychological control of *ElfQuest*. The other times that we have been in development projects, for instance, we were part of the creative team, we wanted to be there at all the development meetings, and we wanted to make sure that the integrity of *ElfQuest* as a property was maintained. The last people in the world that Hollywood wants to talk to are the creators, and we didn't really feel that we had anyone on our side who could talk about *ElfQuest* as well as we could. Now we don't feel that way. Now we've got people in our corner who are, as Richard described them, sharks out there in that ocean, but they also have a spiritual side, they're also capable of talking about *ElfQuest* in a way that we would be comfortable with. We're not out there in that ocean trying to be sharks, because we're not sharks, we're leaving it to the right people.

STINNETT: *As you said earlier, you recently signed with the Creative Artists Agency. What's the significance of such a move?*

RICHARD: Creative Artists and Beanstalk are complementary agencies. Creative Artists is a talent agency, they represent intellectual properties to movies, as well as directors, producers, whatever. Beanstalk is a licensing agency, they represent properties to toy companies, and whatever else, that side of it. The two of them fit together well. Between the two companies, between the two agencies, they have contacts and knowledge and networking and inside information that we could never —

WENDY: And clout.

RICHARD: — and clout that we could never hope to have ourselves. And so these agents will say, "All right, I like *ElfQuest*, I know this producer who's looking for something that is good." Now, I myself can't go to that person I don't even know who he is. But these guys can go to Kenner. I can't go to Kenner. And that's what they're doing.

WENDY: My dream is to have it animated in Japan. I'm crazy about Japanese animation, and CAA has probably the best relationship with Japan of any agency in Hollywood.

RICHARD: Years and years ago, you know, Wendy did two issues of *Beauty and the Beast* for First Comics. First and Warp were in competition for that license. Carolco represented *Beauty and the Beast*. And a fellow by the name of Danny Simon was the guy who was making the deals. Well, Rick Obadiah over at First Comics, and we at Warp, we were trying — I mean, I wanted to publish it because it was going to be good and what the hell. There is this little family thing that's been going on for a while. And Rick wanted to because Rick wanted to. Danny Simon, we met with him, and Rick met with him and blah, blah, blah. And through the course of it we came to understand that Danny Simon looked at us as kind of this little piddly company, not a whole lot of resources, can't do too much, so he gave it to First, because First was doing all this great stuff. So, for a bunch of reasons, First got to do *Beauty and the Beast*. And they did the two issues, and then Wendy was done

ABOVE: *Wendy and Richard and their merchandising gold mine.*

doing it, so First went in other directions and we went in other directions. And time passed, but every so often I would see Danny Simon. And he'd say, "Hi," and so on and so forth, and he would be a little aloof

Last year at the American Booksellers Association show, which is Memorial Day weekend, I was there at the Warp booth and Danny Simon came up and said, "Hi, how's it going," a little bit friendlier We chatted for a little while and I couldn't resist... I said, "Danny, you know, you really should have given *Beauty and the Beast* to us instead of First." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because we're still here." He looked at me and there were two expressions on his face, one of which was, "My God, you know, you're right." And the other one was, "You know, it takes balls to say that to someone like me." And I didn't care. So at the San Diego Con he came up to me and said, "Look, I've formed my own agency, my own licensing agency, I'd really like to talk about representing *ElfQuest*." And he brought over some people from Tyco, the toy company, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, fine. I knew at the time that we were talking with Creative Artists and Beanstalk and there were three or four other people who were wanting to represent *ElfQuest*. And I had a couple of meetings with them. The end result was that I went with Beanstalk and I had to write Danny a letter. It was really hair splitting, because he's good, but these guys are just a little bit better for a couple of intangible reasons. So I wrote him a letter. He called me up a few days later and said, "I got your letter and I respect Beanstalk, I know those guys, but I just want to ask you: What did we do wrong?" And I thought, "Wow, *he's* asking *me* what he did wrong." And I told him, "You did nothing wrong, it was really a judgment call."

WENDY: It was a complete flop of positions because we were once in the position of asking, "What did *we* do wrong that we lost *Beauty and the Beast*?"

RICHARD: As I said to Wendy, it was a validation of *ElfQuest*'s power that we're not quite used to. We're getting there, though

STINNETT: *We heard a lot this last year about Image, the question of creator's rights, and creative freedom. You have been doing this for 15 years, following your own vision. Do you have anything to say to the Image guys that are out there trying to pursue their own vision?*

RICHARD: Not necessarily to the guys who are at Image, but anybody who is attempting this. Image and I might have two very different things to say, but what I would say is if you have a dream that you feel is worth pursuing, then get up off your duff and do it. Secondly, be absolutely honest with yourself and with absolutely everyone else you deal with. If you want to own your work lock, stock and barrel, the way Dave does with *Cerebus*, then take that path and take responsibility for everything good and bad that happens. If somebody comes along and offers you what you think is a fair amount of compensation to do your work for them, and you agree to it, then get up off your duff and do it and take responsibility for everything that happens, good and bad. But go into it eyes open and stick by what you decide to do

STINNETT: *What would you say, Wendy?*

WENDY: What I would say is mainly directed at the creators. And what I have to say is based upon the experience I've already had with a couple of people who have done work for us on *New Blood*. This is not an industry that is going to take care of you emotionally. This is not an industry that's going to open its arms to you and say, "Come on in, there is always room for more." That's not the nature of it anymore. I would say right now is a terrible time to be thinking about starting your own company in your garage. It may be that the distributors are still looking for the next *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, but such a phenomenon is very rare. And right now, from where I'm standing, I would say you have a snowball's chance in hell of starting your own little company out of your garage and surviving. If you can hook up with an independent publisher who shares your vision, but who is established somewhat, and is interested in publishing your material, I would say that that is the better route to go now rather than trying to start up your own company. If you can hook up with a mainstream company, and it is interested in your vision, all the better. You have to, as Richard said, go into it with your eyes open, you have to take responsibility for your position, whatever that may be If you want to be a team player, if you want to go to work for Marvel and draw *Spider-Man*, you have to be willing to play on the team and to compromise some of the things that you might envision. If you want to be completely on your own and tell your own story

ABOVE: *A page from* Beauty and the Beast Night of Beauty, *written and illustrated by Wendy and published by First*
INSET: *The book's cover painted by Jim Warren.*

ABOVE: *Things turn ugly in* ElfQuest: Siege at Blue Mountain *#2.*

hire. In the 1970s, that was the big groundswell. And work-for-hire has become a term that brings a knee-jerk reaction from most people; it's a bad thing, work-for-hire is automatically evil

Everybody who is doing something for us is doing it on a work for-hire basis They know it, we know it, they're happy with what their compensation is, we're happy to have them doing it. If *ElfQuest* gets big, they share in that because of the work that they did. There is nothing inherently wrong with work-for-hire. What's wrong is if you go into it with one expectation and your partner, whether it's a creative partner or a publishing partner or a business partner, goes into it with another expectation, and you haven't been honest with each other. That's when you get into trouble.

WENDY: Yes, and many creators have a victim's attitude about themselves. They go in expecting the worst, they go expecting to be screwed by their editor and their company. And basically, if you walk across a bridge into a city expecting certain things, you are going to find in that city what you are expecting. If you're honest with people, by and large, people will be honest with you

STINNETT: *How is the atmosphere for women working in comics today? Has it gotten any better?*

WENDY: Oh, cripes. Yes, that's a really good question How is the atmosphere for women in the industry? When I first got into doing comics, I was pretty much a freak. But I thought as the years went by that I would see more and more women with their particular visions and their particular styles of storytelling coming in. I thought I was going to be the first of many In fact, there are fewer women in the business now than ever before, really I mean, there are a number of them in the editorial and management areas, but as far as creators, it's... They're very, very rare. It's not an easy business for women to be in for a number of reasons. First of all, look at what's being published right now that really attracts women; there's not a hell of a lot of material. So, the 18-, 19-, 20-year-old female artist who might be interested in reading comics is not seeing a hell of a lot of material that's going to inspire her to say, "I can find a career here." Back when I was reading comics and thinking about starting *ElfQuest*, there

in your own way, you either have to hook up with someone who shares that vision and who says, "Go and do and be well," or again you may even have to compromise there. You know, it's a much tougher game now than it was when we started.

RICHARD: It goes back to being honest with yourself and what you want to do. The whole creators' rights movement has grown out of the great disaffections with work-for-

were still some types of storytelling going on that I could relate to. Nowadays I don't read comics anymore. I don't find entertainment in them. Especially the ones that are just a bunch of people in tight clothes hitting each other That whole nihilistic dark side stuff

My experience working with a couple of the women creators who are now doing stuff for Warp Graphics shows me that there is still an expectation on their part that the industry is going to take care of them emotionally. I think, in general, women tend to invent this expectation for themselves possibly more than men do, and they're always so horribly shocked when they are treated as men are treated. I mean, men are up against a lot, you know, it's kind of a dog-eat-dog sort of thing. And when women get into that environment and are treated dog-eat-dog, they tend to take it very personally, very much to heart, and I have had to literally talk some of the women I've worked with through this emotional experience. I have already been through it. I tend to be a little more equinimous about it. And of course, from dealing with Richard, I'm continually assaulted with the male way of doing things. But no, that's just a joke because Richard does not perceive gender, he just treats people according to their talent and not according to their gender.

STINNETT: *So basically, what you're saying is that women are maybe perceiving some sort of discrimination when they're actually being treated the same as men?*

WENDY: Exactly And I don't care who wants to rise up, whether it's Trina Robbins or anyone else, and call me a sexist. I am standing up to say right now that in my experience — and I have talked to many of them, and I've worked with a few of them — women who want to come into the business come in with a certain set of expectations among which is, "I am going to be taken care of emotionally." This is not true. And they have to learn that it's not personal, and if they get banged around, it's no more or less than anybody else in the industry has to deal with.

I mean, look at the way Chris Claremont was treated. Seventeen years on *X-Men*, literally floating Marvel on his talent for how many years, and he is kicked out without... I mean, talk about no gold watch. I can't even say enough about how he was treated. And you know, there are other women in the business who have been shafted, too. But this is no more or less than what males get.

STINNETT: *Everyone gets the shaft.*

WENDY: Right. But I have been on the phone for hours with women who have gotten shafted or gotten mistreated in their opinion, and they cannot comprehend why I just try to explain, "This is the way it works, and you are down there in the trenches and you are.. Guess what? You are being treated as an equal. This is what you fought for all along, to be treated as an equal. You are getting the same kind of shit everybody else is getting." If you want to be a feminist, you have to be out there in the trenches with the guys.

RICHARD: It's the one part of the *Batman Returns* film that strikes me as being the most perversely honest with respect to what we're talking about right now. You have Catwoman and Batman up there, they're slugging it out, well, they're not slugging yet but they're moving and moving and moving and moving, and he's taking the hits from her, finally he gets PO'd, he slugs her. And she simpers, "Why'd you do that? I'm a woman."

WENDY: And what did he do? "Oh, I'm sorry." And she kicks him right in the —

RICHARD: Right. She uses that little ploy. And even that says something about how people perceive women, too, as being real underhanded. No, see, the point I'm trying to make here is that I don't think that happens consciously, but that attitude that you were talking about, that expectation that they will be taken care of, gets thwarted. Women are not necessarily even conscious of it, and that turns them around and makes bitterness.

WENDY: If you are a woman who wants to come into this business, first of all you have to realize that it is largely run by a mentality that is adolescent male, which means that mentality's not going to be real perceptive about peoples' feelings and it's not going to be real perceptive about creative, whatever, you know.

Besides, women creators do create differently than men do. Women come from an entirely different .. Just working with Sarah Byam has been a wonderful education for me. I write like a guy. I have been at it long enough that I write like a guy. I write from structure to detail. Sarah writes from detail to structure. It drives me out of my mind. We're coming to a synergy in our partnership where she feels the gestalt of the story and she feels all the details and she perceives all the different characters she's working with very even-handedly. That comes first, and then later on for her comes the structure of what really happened. My approach to it as an editor is to say to her, "Mommy, tell me a story Don't embellish it, don't add your opinion to it, just tell me what happened." That's what I want to see from her first.

This is also the way women draw. I mean, a lot of female fan artists, and I have looked at thousands of portfolios from female fan artists, they all — again I'm going to sound like a sexist, but this is what I have literally seen — they all embellish their artwork with tremendous detail and sensitivity to hairdo and costume and glow and line, and the structure of the figure is extremely weak. Their eye is on the detail, on the finishing of the embellishment rather than on the structure. And for any woman coming into the industry, I just cry out, "Think structure *first*, think the solid ground your character is built upon."

I'm not afraid to say what I think anymore, or whether or not I'm going to offend feminists. I mean, there have been groundbreaking women in the industry, but you have to call it as you see it, and what I've seen in my experience with women is that they still expect to be taken care of emotionally, and they're not going to be.

"Women creators do create differently than men do."

ABOVE: *Drawings from Wendy's original model sheet for Leetah, circa 1977*

"If in 15 years *ElfQuest* is thought of in the same positive way and by as many people as Dr. Seuss is today, I will die a happy guy."

STINNETT: *Do you think you'll be around in 15 more years?*
RICHARD: You know, this is getting to be a fairly standard type of question. I guess for anybody who celebrates a significant anniversary that is the kind of question you ask. Usually it's framed as, "Where do you want to be in 15 years?" So for us there is not even an element of *if*, it's *when*. I like to say, and I'm going to keep on saying it until it happens, because it's going to happen, that you have fads in comics that come and go, you have Image, it's going to go. . I believe that in 15 years comics as a general medium won't be any less in the ghetto than it is now, because comics companies just aren't doing anything different. What are *we* going to be doing? We're going to be shepherding *ElfQuest*. I don't know if we will be doing comics, or if we will be doing stories, or both, or something new.

WENDY: More than likely, we are going to be shepherding a universe.
RICHARD: We are in the same business that Homer was in. We're storytellers. My dream as a publisher, co-creator, and whatever else, is that if in 15 years *ElfQuest* is thought of in the same positive way and by as many people as Dr. Seuss is today, I will die a happy guy. Because that will mean we have broken out and we're part of a much wider culture. I think *ElfQuest* is robust enough and sensitive enough to appeal to that many people.
WENDY: I think beginning to aim this year at children through our children's books line, and seeing what response we get to that, I feel very positive about it and I think it's going to be another kind of a breakthrough for us. There is a huge untapped audience of children. Children used to buy comics back in the — little kids used to buy them. That's not the case anymore. So maybe we don't do comics for little kids, maybe our story —
RICHARD: We can't ever go back to when there was no TV. But what we can do is to make something available that is as satisfying as anything else a young reader might turn to.
STINNETT: *Ten years ago you were asked what your favorite issue of* ElfQuest *was, and you said the next one. Would you still agree with that today?*
RICHARD: Well, I would have to say yes, but ten years ago I knew in pretty great detail what the next one was going to be, because ten years ago we were in the middle of the original saga, we had the whole thing plotted out, we knew what each step was going to be. Today, if I say the next one —
WENDY: You don't necessarily know.
RICHARD: Well, one, I don't know that I can say next issue so much as I might say next project, which is made up of a whole bunch of issues that are going to involve more people and more creative talent than we've ever played with before. That is so incredibly exciting and a little bit scary that if you asked me what is my favorite fill-in-the-blank, I will still say the next one, but it's what's going in the blank that has changed a little bit.

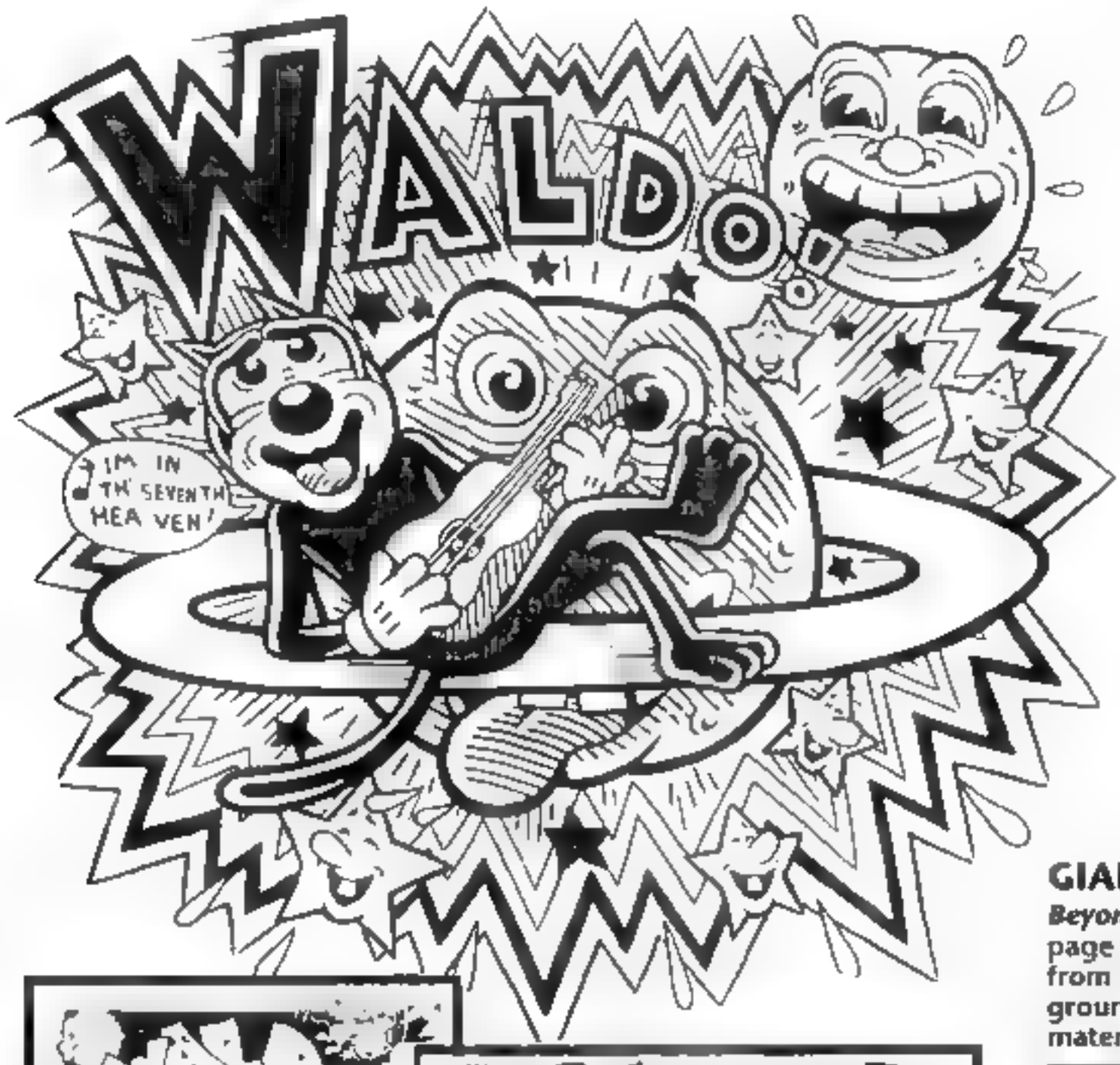
ABOVE: *The end to a successful bedtime story in* ElfQuest New Blood *#7's "King of the Hill," written by Terry Beatty and Wendi Lee and drawn by Gary Kato*

PART TWO — 1994

ANDREW CRAIG: *What have you guys been doing during the past year? Anything wild, exciting, different?*
RICHARD: We spent the whole bleeping year on the road. Last year, 1993, was *ElfQuest*'s 15th anniversary of publication, and we put on a three-dozen-stop tour that went from January through December, and we burned ourselves to a fine crisp and did a lot of talking with store owners and meeting the readers. It nearly killed us, but it was very well worth it.
CRAIG: *And you managed to get the book out too — I'm impressed.*
WENDY: In the midst of all that, Warp Graphics changed and grew considerably, and we also managed to move into some brand new offices toward the end of the year
RICHARD: That's right, we moved to a new, larger location, and there are six people working at Warp Graphics now instead of two.
CRAIG: *Moving up in the world. When the last interview was done, a year ago, you had pretty much gone and formulated all the plans for the various* Elf *titles and you'd just mentioned two other titles* — Jink *I think was one of them.*
WENDY: That's very exciting. Some very recent developments have happened with *Jink*. We are extremely fortunate to have John Ostrander coming on board as the writer It's a marriage made in heaven — John fell in love with *Jink* and he knew her instantly. When we presented him with the notes on Jink, he just went through them like a whip and was immediately adding things to the storyline and he seemed to catch on right away as to who this character is. He seems to find the same energy in the character as you would find in *Modesty Blaise*, for example. So Jink is going to have a very sophisticated and, at the same time, very human approach through John's writing
CRAIG: *Are you going to be drawing it?*
WENDY: No.
CRAIG: *Have you figured out who's going to be?*
WENDY: At this point we're interviewing several artists. While we want to have one regular artist do the first six part mini-series of *Jink*; we are not past the idea of having different guest artists. At this point, the sky's the limit. We're thinking very audaciously with *Jink*.
CRAIG: *I've only read a little bit about* Jink, *and the other title,* The Rebels. *Would it be totally off-base to say these sound like superhero books?*
RICHARD: Well... no. You're not off base. You're looking to steal second, but you're not off first yet. Both of these titles happen on the world of Two Moons, which is the world of *ElfQuest*. In the future of the world, relative to where the stories are happening now, of course human civilization is going to have advanced, it's going to have become technological And human civilization is going to have spread out all over the place, just like it did here. The magic places are going to become few and far between, and whatever lives there is going to be very jealous of those places. *Jink* and *The Rebels* are tied into the *ElfQuest* universe. But just as *ElfQuest* has been described as a

DEITCH TREATS!

BLOW YOUR MIND WITH THESE KIM DEITCH CLASSICS!

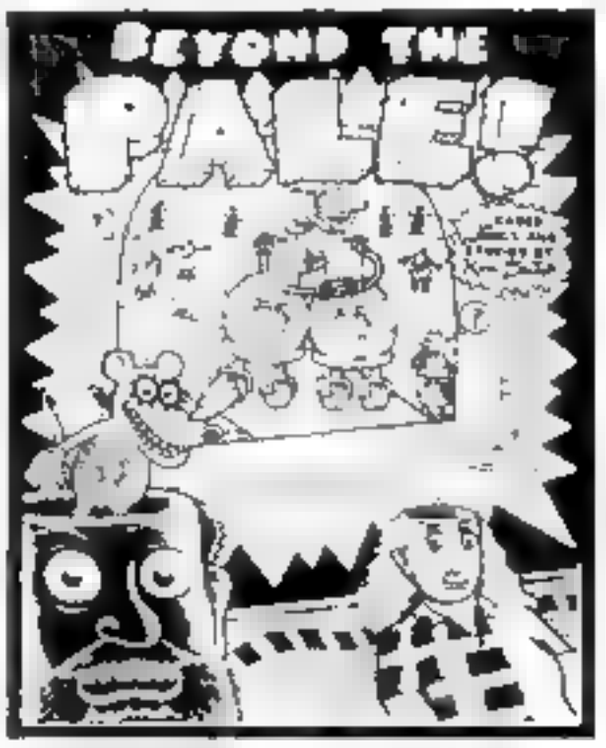


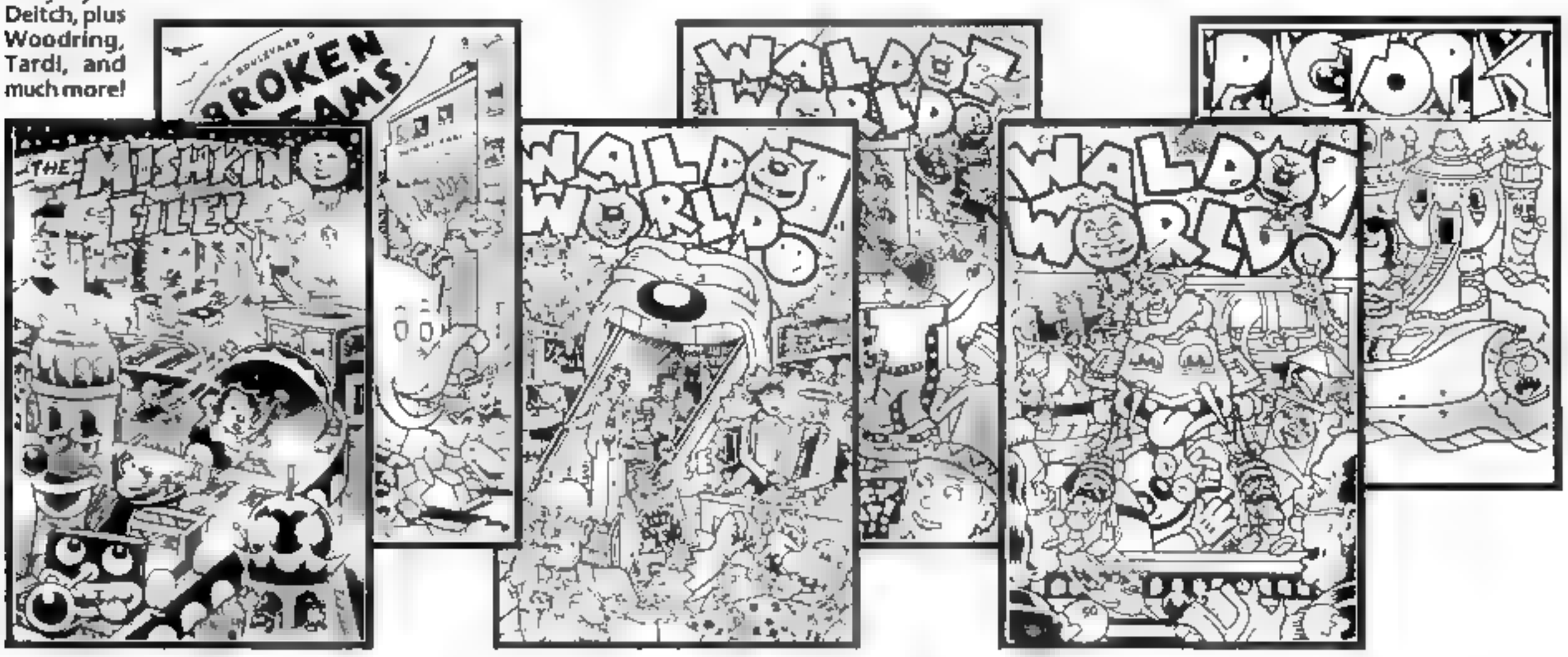
WALDO T-SHIRT:
Flamboyantly psychedelic colors on a white t-shirt, available in M, L, or XL. **($15.95)**

THE MISHKIN SAGA:
Follow the continuing tale of beleaguered animation pioneer Ted Mishkin, and his inspiration and curse, Waldo the cat. ***Boulevard of Broken Dreams*** **($3.95)** is the 41-page opening salvo. ***The Mishkin File*** **($2.95)** delves into Ted's troubled soul. The most recent (and concluding) chapter, ***Waldo World*** (3 issues, **$2.50** each), brings the story up-to-date as the latest Mishkin heir, Nate, prowls the malls of '90s America with Waldo in tow. For a special look at the full-color animation art of Ted Mishkin, pick up ***Pictopia*** **#2 ($7.95)**, which also includes a new cover and story by K. Deitch, plus Woodring, Tardi, and much more!

THE WALDO BOOKSHELF:
Two handsome trade paperbacks featuring Deitch's mascot. ***All Waldo Comics*** is a trip down memory lane (from 1969's "Deja Vu" to today), while ***A Shroud For Waldo*** collects the sacrilegious *L.A. Reader* epic. **($7.95** each)

GIANT SLAB O' DEITCH:
Beyond the Pale is a massive 144-page collection of Deitch's best from the Golden Age of undergrounds. Includes fold-outs, new material, intro, and more! **($14.95)**





Send all orders to **Fantagraphics Books,** *Waldo dept., 7563 Lake City Way NE. Seattle WA 98115. Add $1.00 shipping for each book or t-shirt, 25¢ for each comic book. (Outside U.S. $2.00 for books, 50¢ for comic books.) Check or money order only, please-- or order by VISA or MASTERCARD by calling 800-657-1100. Allow six to eight weeks for delivery.*

"There are a lot of people who look at the word 'elf,' and they immediately think *The Hobbit* or Keebler Elves and they don't want anything to do with it."

TOP: *Barry Blair art from the story "Darkness Rising" in* ElfQuest: New Blood Summer Special *#1.*
ABOVE: *"Elfis" is healed (Hallelujah!) in Terry Collins and Bill Neville's "Heal Thy Elf!" in* ElfQuest: New Blood '93 Summer Special *#1*

fantasy with science fiction underpinnings, *Jink* and *The Rebels* would more properly be described as science fiction with fantasy underpinnings. The characters are going to be nice, wonderful, strong characters, the way all of the ones in *ElfQuest* are, but they are none of them superheroes.

CRAIG: *Following this, the strength of* ElfQuest *has always been of course that it was a traditional. Do you guys think that maybe now with* Jink *and* The Rebels *you are being more mainstream?*

WENDY: No, but I'll tell you what: What we do think *Jink* and *The Rebels* will do is to interest people in *ElfQuest* who had previously been put off by elves. You have to admit, there are a lot of people who look at the word "elf," and they immediately think *The Hobbit* or Keebler Elves and cutesie-poo, and they don't want anything to do with it. Particularly in today's climate, where everybody wants to be real cool with what they're reading. Back when we started *ElfQuest*, Tolkein was still very hot and people were still pretty much aware of high fantasy. But nowadays, high fantasy has been replaced by cyberpunk, so people don't look at elves the same way they did when we first started. So we think that *Jink* and *The Rebels*, which are definitely going to have a very *ElfQuest*-like flavor, will interest people who are more interested in science fiction and who might want to take a look at the ElfQuest universe from that point of view, then look at our other books to catch all the cross-references.

CRAIG: *In all the titles that are currently out, you guys are listed as doing writing or editing jobs. Is it pretty much going to stay this way? Or will you be drawing these books more, now that the tour is over?*

RICHARD: The tour is over, this is true. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending upon your point of view, the activity of tour looks like it's going to be replaced with other types of activity. Speaking only for myself, over the last bunch of years, my energies within Warp Graphics have focused more on editorial and more on business, and Wendy's has gone more toward writing and drawing the books pretty much by her lonesome up until recently, when we started bringing other people on. We are very, very close to some fairly substantial, major entertainment deals that have to do with *ElfQuest*. The most significant is that there is a producer who's very interested in turning *ElfQuest* into an animated feature film. Once that happens, once that ball starts rolling, both of us, I strongly suspect, are going to have a lot of other things on our plates than just writing and drawing comics. I will have Lord knows what other things to occupy my time with the business end of things, and Wendy has — we've heard that they're very desirous of having her be involved with the treatment and storyboards for this film. On top of which, we're going to have at least a half a dozen teams of people working on the various titles. So I suspect that's what '94 is going to look like more than anything else. Although there was the holiday special that you did with John Byrne, so...

WENDY: Yeah, you can expect something — I don't know what — but you can expect something from me every year. I will do some kind of special project. Maybe I'll be teaming up with another artist as I did with John — that was so satisfying that I'm *very* much looking forward to teaming up with him again. I have certainly not abandoned *ElfQuest* entirely in terms of drawing it, but I am also continuing to write the *Hidden Years* series, and that's another bit of news that actually just came up this weekend. We have decided to take the *Hidden Years* title in which we continue the regular storyline of the Wolf-riders, and we're going to split it into two titles. *Hidden Years* will continue as its own title, and the storyline it is currently carrying called, "Shards," is going to become its own series.

CRAIG: *A mini-series, or regular, continuing...*

WENDY: Well, an awfully long mini-series, if you want to call it a mini-series.

CRAIG: *The same way the original one started as a mini-series.*

WENDY: Exactly.

RICHARD: In retrospect, they're all mini-series, unless they happen to still be published. But we're just discovering that, rather like kudzu, *ElfQuest* seems to have an incredible desire to grow and generate stories — and this is not padding, this is not bologna — it's that the stories are *there*. The primary reason for even involving other people was to give us a hand, because two people can only do so much in the telling of these stories.

WENDY: Let me explain a little more to you about the split-up of these two books. Last year we received some *incredible* samples from a Brazilian artist who took some of our younger characters, especially Ember, the daughter of Cutter, and sent us such incredible artwork that we thought, "Oh, if only we could develop a book for this guy to do!" So what's going to happen to *Hidden Years* is that the Wolfriders are going to split into two tribes and Ember

is going to have a shot at becoming a chieftess in her own right. She is going to lead half the Wolfriders on another journey while Cutter continues with the followers he's chosen to rescue the Palace of the High Ones from the humans. So on the one hand, you'll have this wonderful action story about the more action-oriented Wolfriders called *Shards*, and then *Hidden Years* will continue with Ember's storyline and a coming-of-age story for a young girl in the position of chief.

CRAIG: *This brings up a few problems I had recently. You made comments in previous interviews that you think that* ElfQuest *was something you could read to your children. Do you think that with the number of books all interwoven, with continuity and characters building up, it's going to be harder to get into the story? I read the original* ElfQuest *series like it was the Bible when I was younger, and I picked up the most recent* New Blood *story, and I couldn't figure out who* half *of these people were* catching up. We're doing a big piece of work here.

CRAIG: *About the artist, Barry Blair; this guy has not been particularly well-liked within the community, although he seems to have been taken on by you as somewhat of a regular artist/writer on* New Blood. *What attracted you to his work? Why is he now working for you?*

WENDY: Since I am story editor and art director of the book, I'll put my two cents in first. In other interviews I have said that Barry Blair is probably one of the most misunderstood people in comics. He has dealt with subject matter throughout his career that has made a lot of people uncomfortable. Another thing is, he has worked so rapidly, sometimes turning out three, four, or five books *a month*, that he never quite allowed himself to finish his artwork as much as he was capable of. He got into the habit of relying on quantity rather than quality. But the quality was there when he allowed himself. So now that Barry is with us, what we're working on is bringing out the side of him that most people

"Rather like kudzu, *ElfQuest* seems to have an incredible desire to grow and generate stories."

RICHARD: You do have a point. We have begun a process that is going to take months to do, whereby all of the titles that we publish have points of tangency with all the other titles. I don't want to say that as if we're looking to become continuity freaks, but this is a world, and just like the Earth has a past, a present, and hopefully a future, and things do tie together, whether that tie is very strong or weak, we want to do that with *ElfQuest*. To answer the question of somebody coming in on it fresh and getting hit with 15 years of back story, two things are going to make that easier for the new reader. First of all, in all of the titles that we're doing now, we've added a "What-has-gone-before." It's a little bit of a help. If you can pick up an issue and you haven't seen the previous ones you do get a synopsis. At least you can come in on the story. The other thing that we're doing is creating a timeline that will be published in all the titles that will tie all of these together. "Oh, I'm reading this, and it relates to all of these others in this way."

CRAIG: *That would make it helpful, because that last storyline confused me.*

WENDY: You're talking about *New Blood*?

RICHARD: You see events taking place over some 10,000 years, in just one issue of *New Blood*. We did some have never seen. He takes his time, and he sits down and tells a story all the way through, and he is doing a monthly book for us now that *New Blood* is a series, he's writing and drawing it, and he's taking some of the younger characters on a brand new quest. I think people are starting to see work from him now that they never expected to see.

RICHARD: For whatever reason, Barry spent a lot of time doing a lot of books that a lot of people had a lot of negative reaction to. Whatever those reasons are or were, they were then, and here we are now. We've known Barry for a long time, and we got to talking about *ElfQuest* and he expressed a desire when we started thinking about expanding the line: "Do you think there's something I could do?" We knew he had been cranking out these other books like sausages and that the subject matter wasn't the best and the quality wasn't necessarily the best, but there's something there that we saw. "Okay, let's sit down and have a serious talk about some of the facts of life here." At the end of that talk and several hundred others just like it since then... For us, it's like digging down into absolutely ordinary-looking dirt, and striking a very rich vein of some precious material, because he's a very good storyteller, he's a quite good artist, and he's quite good at doing the kind of art that we like, which is not the kind of art that 99 percent of the

ABOVE: *Inspired madness from Nat Gertler's "How Not to Write* ElfQuest, New Blood*!" in* ElfQuest: New Blood *'93 Summer Special #1 (art by Brian Buniak).*

comics industry is looking for these days.

WENDY: Do you have any idea how hard it is to find artists who actually want to draw elves? They are very, very few and far between.

CRAIG: *Some Japanese artists are, I suppose.*

RICHARD: Even they are so stylized, for the most part, that it's not quite what we're looking for. But another thing that we did with him is we said, "Okay Barry, you've got a month to draw this book. You don't have to do it in two days. And if you come back with it finished in two days, we're going to send you back. You have to take all the time we're giving you to do this." And once that sunk in, the work really became something to see.

WENDY: One of the things that's most surprising about the work Barry is doing for us is his colors. He's been learning some of the techniques that I used on the *Hidden Years* hardcover, in addition to his own airbrush techniques. What he's managed to come up with is something that's brilliant and well-balanced at the same time. I'm very impressed with the color work he's doing for us.

CRAIG: *Has there been a point, after 15 years of this, that you think, "All right, I'm sick of elves!"?*

RICHARD: That was 10 years ago.

WENDY: Of course. You take on any long-term project and there are going to be times that you wish you were never born! [laughs] But the only reason that Richard and I are doing this now is because we still love it. We still love *ElfQuest* in whatever form it takes. I often say to people, "I'm like a shepherd who really hates sheep." Because I'm not that big a comics fan. It isn't because I adored comics that I came to do *ElfQuest* in the first place. It's just that the comics medium seemed to be the closest thing to putting movies on paper that we could do, and *ElfQuest* has been a movie that's been running in my head for the longest time. But I would have to say it's for the love of *ElfQuest*, not necessarily for the love of comics, that we keep doing this, and so far we still love our child.

CRAIG: *Are there any comics you do read?*

RICHARD: Oh Lord..

WENDY: Well, we like *Bone*. But who doesn't?

RICHARD: *Bone* is this period of time's fair-haired comic. *ElfQuest* was once, and there have been others. Up until a little while ago, I was following the whole *Superman* storyline, not because I'm that enamored of *Superman*, but because I was just very, very curious to see how a company would play a character for maximum marketing. Once they brought him back, the stories just went to hell, so I'm not doing that any more. I would have to say there's probably not any title that we read regularly. With people whom we think are very talented, like Neil Gaiman, what'll happen is, we won't read *Sandman* for a while, then the collection will come out and I'll get the book and

ABOVE: *Troll point-of-view from* ElfQuest, *book four*

I'll get my *Sandman* fix. Mostly it's sporadic. We spend so much time doing comics, it's very difficult to sit down with comics for relaxation.

WENDY: That really is true. When you make your living at it, you want to go out to the A&P instead of.. [laughs]

RICHARD: And I notice there are a lot of people who are in comics who read comics, and I can't understand it. I think this reinforces a feeling that we have that we're not really in comics. We're telling *ElfQuest* and we're publishing *ElfQuest* stories, but we're not really "in" comics.

CRAIG: *Which leads to the point. If you were given the choice, for example, to get out of comics, do you think you could successfully do it with a series of novels or something else?*

WENDY: Well, that's already happened.

CRAIG: *But I mean, effectively* leaving *comics.*

RICHARD: I would say, and this is probably a little bit revolutionary, but doing the comics provides us with a more or less constant flow both of capital, and of exposure. We could, I think, put all the same material into the hardcover books that we do, and they would sell very well both through the direct shops and the mainstream outlets like Waldenbooks and B. Dalton stores. I think were it not for the constancy of the exposure that you get by doing a comic book, we could not do that.

WENDY: Let me also add that, as Richard mentioned earlier, we're pretty damn close to realizing a 15-year-old dream, which is a breakthrough into larger things such as film and television. We've been up to the altar several times with this, as people well know. But we have *never* been in a position like this before, working with the kind of powerful people we're working with right now. So I would have to say that things are looking extremely good. When this happens, this is going to be the realization of my dream for *ElfQuest*, because I always wanted to see it in motion, in animation. I really think that when that happens, *ElfQuest* will be as much that to me as it has ever been a comic book. I personally have never regarded *ElfQuest* as just a comic book; it's whatever medium it's been translated into, whether that was music or prose or portfolios or whatever. Anything that gets the story told, as far as I'm concerned, is part of the *ElfQuest* universe.

CRAIG: *Would you like to name names regarding who you're dealing with right now?*

RICHARD: That's not a problem. We've learned how to be coy over 15 years, just because, as Wendy said, we have been close and then things have fallen through. We just don't want to be the publisher that cried wolf. It all began about two years ago when we secured representation for *ElfQuest* with Creative Artists Agency, which is probably *the* most powerful entertainment agency in the world today. They put us together with a fellow by the name of Edward Pressman, who is a producer, and if the name by itself isn't familiar, I almost guarantee that you've seen his films, because he produced both of the *Conan* movies, he did *Wall Street*, he did *Talk Radio* and *Storyville* and *Hoffa*, and *Reversal of Fortune*, and he is producing, has produced, both the *Crow* film that had that weird business with Brandon Lee, and also the *Judge Dredd* film. So there's a definite interest on his part in exploring the comics medium, and his entire family, his wife and young son, are very, very avid *ElfQuest* fans. Somebody once said that here is a man who does not have a high failure rate. And we feel very fortunate to be connected with him.

WENDY: I think the real miracle of Ed Pressman is that he's a rarity in Hollywood. He's an independent producer who has managed to stay on top of his game and to basically make the films he wants to make. He doesn't really kowtow to anybody. He's also a reader. He actually bothered to read *ElfQuest* and find out what it was really about. He said he had known about it for years but had just assumed, like so many people do, that it was some kind of *Hobbit* ripoff, and when he finally read it, he realized it was entirely different from that, and that's what got him interested in the storyline as a film possibility.

CRAIG: *Richard's recent editorial in the* Journal *[#164] shows he has some pretty strong opinions about the current stage of the comic market, if you want to call it that. With the recent things that have been going on, some companies going under and enough superhero companies to sink a dozen battleships starting up, one assumes you probably have some thoughts on this. What do you think of the current state?*

RICHARD: Jesus, the current state of affairs in comics... Where do you begin? Here's a thought that will probably piss some people off — a rumor came into the office today to the effect that Capital City distribution is up for sale.

WENDY: Oh geez!

RICHARD: I have no idea if that's true or not.

WENDY: Oh no.

RICHARD: I think it's an incredibly amusing and interesting rumor, but it's a rumor and I have no way of knowing if it's true or not. But that leads me to a thought or two about distribution itself in this business — a topic that could really get me started. There's something wrong with the distribution process for the comics direct market. There has been for some time, and I think it's getting worse rather than better. We have these large businesses, and there are really only two of them, and if the rumor is true, there will probably soon be only one, who are in complete control of the channels by which a book or a comic magazine gets from publisher to the retailer, and there's no other way to do it except directly, which, if you're publisher of any size, is an impossible hassle. Yet we have these big distribution businesses who are not simply pipelines, but they're also in the business of marketing the same stuff that they're distributing. And in no other business, no other publishing and probably no other type of business, do you have that. The *manufacturer* markets, and the retailer buys, and the distributor is a pipeline and that's all. But here we have the very people who are in control of that channel making very important decisions about who flows along that channel and who doesn't. I find that to be onerous. Lord knows I consider Warp Graphics lucky not to have incurred the wrath of certain distributors the way certain smaller publishers have. But I don't think that's a decision for a distributor to make. So there's one observation. There goes 80 percent of our saleability right there.

WENDY: Yeah! Talk about not incurring the wrath of distributors! [laughs]

ABOVE: *A 1979 Wendy preproduction sketch, reprinted in* ElfQuest *#21*

"It isn't because I adored comics that I came to do *ElfQuest* in the first place. It's just that the comics medium seemed to be the closest thing to putting movies on paper that we could do."

"There's something in *ElfQuest* that appeals to some sort of Jungian archetype matrix that exists in every human being."

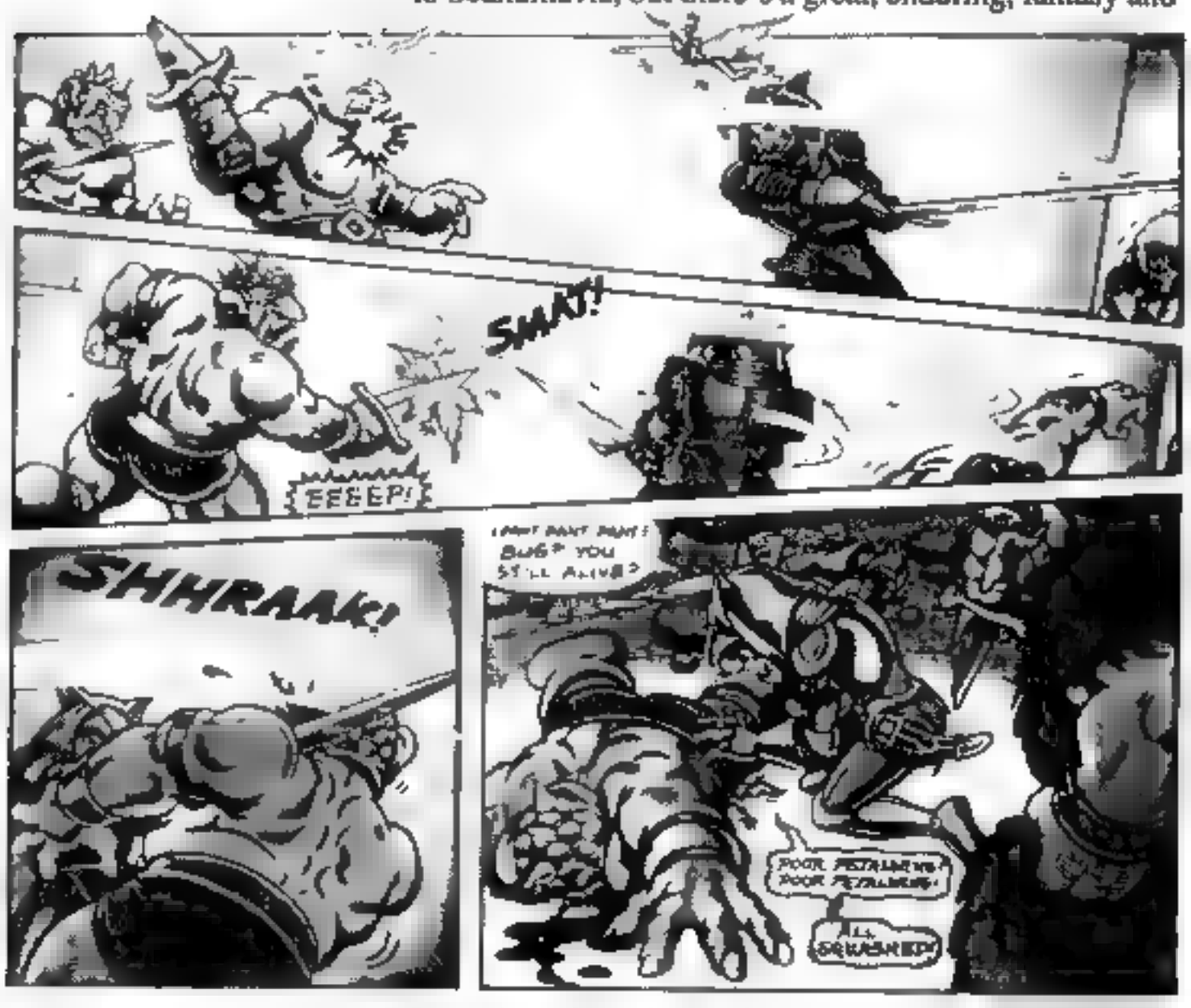
RICHARD: I'm not saying anything I haven't said before, or won't say again. There is something quite off-balance about that. I don't see how, if the number of players in comics distribution keeps getting smaller and smaller so that we approach something that looks and walks and quacks and smells vaguely monopolistic, that it's going to get any better. Now don't start me about Image or anything like that. It's been done to death.

CRAIG: *Image has been done to death — why bother? But if there's anything off the top of your head...*

RICHARD: The thing that is closest to the top of my head, since there's less and less hair there, is that, as I've said many, many times before, if comics are going to be regarded in this country as anything other than the juvenile, valueless pap that I think most middle-class Jane and Joe Average Americans think of comics, there's got to be such a massive shift along the lines toward selling them the way it's done in Europe and selling them the way it's done in Japan that I can't envision it happening. I work toward it every day of my life, but I don't see that we're going to get there anytime soon.

WENDY: We have one more bit of news, which is that *ElfQuest* is about to be translated into Russian. They don't have any comic books over there, so we may very well be the first! [laughs]

RICHARD: We'll be among the first; Communism fails, the Wall goes down, and *ElfQuest* goes marching in. [Wendy laughs] I had a talk just a couple of days ago with an agent who's going to be representing us over there, and we got to talking about the very strong fantasy traditions of all that portion of the world. You tend to think of it being restricted to Scandinavia, but there's a great, enduring, fantasy and fairytale tradition in Russian. One advantage that *ElfQuest* has that other comic properties may not have is that we're appealing to something very old. Russia is a monstrously old country when you get right down to it, and the people live with their traditions and their native beliefs a lot more so than we do in this country. We're a hodgepodge of a country as far as culture goes. The only indigenous culture we have is the Native American, and that's almost non-existent.



ABOVE: *A scene from the final battle with the trolls in* ElfQuest, *book four*

WENDY: That's interesting, though, because if *ElfQuest* draws on any tradition at all, it draws more on Native American than European

RICHARD: What I think what Wendy is getting at is that there's something in *ElfQuest* that appeals to some sort of Jungian archetype matrix that exists in every human being. In some cultures, that's just closer to the surface than it is here.

CRAIG: *That leads me to one of the harder questions I have to ask. When all these things are out, you'll have seven titles going. Most of these titles at this point are still coming out of things that were created by you two. How do you handle other creators doing things? For example, I understand* WaveDancers *was put together more or less by an Australian writer/artist team.*

RICHARD: That's correct. How do we handle that?

CRAIG: *Yes, how do you handle other creator's creations?*

RICHARD: We handle that in exactly the same way we handle it when we invite other science fiction and fantasy writers to do short prose stories for the *Blood of Ten Chiefs* anthology series. The *WaveDancers* crew approached us and said, "We love *ElfQuest*, we've been fans, and we would very much like to tell the story of these characters who are based on your concepts. They live over here under the sea and they're going to have these adventures," and they made a proposal to us. This was the first time that we had been approached like this, because, as you point out, everything else grew out of and is a direct offshoot of what Wendy and I created years ago and what we've been spinning ever since.

By way of illustration, how we've handled the prose stories is that somebody like Mercedes Lackey, who is a fine writer, says, "I'd like to do an *ElfQuest* story. And I'd like to do the story about this character that you created." Fine. In the course of telling that story, she is very likely, and I'd be surprised if she didn't, to invent some auxiliary characters. We didn't create those characters, she did. But we created the world and the customs within which all those characters work. So we have a two-way agreement. The agreement is very simple and says that for the work that you do, and for the characters that you create, you share in whatever this story that you wrote for us gains. It's, I guess, a kind of benevolent work-for-hire, or at least fairly compensated work-for-hire, and that's not a dirty phrase in my vocabulary. I mean, nobody comes in here doing that with their eyes closed, because we don't let them. And it's the same thing with the *WaveDancers*. That group came to us and said, "We've created this band of characters, they exist in *your* world, and they're based on your concepts." So the agreement that we have with them is very simple: We publish these stories, they share in everything that comes from the stories, whether they are published in comic book form or in hardcover collection form, or if there's a toy or movie made out of it. They have equity in that. The two-way protection is, let's say someday they get tired of doing this. We can continue to use those characters as long as we continue to compensate them. If they want to do something with those same characters, then the reverse kicks in too. But if for some reason we don't want to do anything anymore, then we don't use those characters, they don't use the *ElfQuest* concepts anymore, and it's very clean.

WENDY: From my point of view, I think the most important

thing that's taken place for me over the past couple of years is a letting go. Naturally I've been deeply attached to *ElfQuest* for 15 years and have been the sole source of the look of the characters. So when we started early on working with other artists, my biggest struggle was to accept another artist's input or style of interpreting the characters, and yet at the same time work with them to get the characters as close on model as possible. That's still happening right now with Brandon McKinney, who's drawing the *Hidden Years* series and who will be taking over *Shards.* Because he's working with the original Wolfriders, that means he really has to work hard to keep them on model. But, by the same token, he's got his own style and his own manner of expression, and there was a period where I was penciling his layouts for him, just doing rough pencils so he could get an idea of the way I would pace a story or pose a character. But I stopped doing that after a certain time, just to let him have more control and more of a hand in his own book. It really has been a letting go process for me. The same with Barry Blair. Barry is working with characters I designed years ago, and he's making them his own. I think that's wonderful, because the more an artist feels a book is his own, the more of himself or herself they can put into it.

CRAIG: *Is there anything you'd like to announce about what's going on or coming up?*

RICHARD: The plans we have for *ElfQuest* extend far beyond the boundaries of the comics direct market. That's something that we have nurtured for a long, long time, the market that exists outside of the comic shops. I think a few publishers are just beginning to see that that is very, very fertile ground. Others seem to be saying, "Look, that's not of interest to me, there's no sense in going out there, there's no percentage in going out there, I don't want to go out there." That's fine too. We have known for all of *ElfQuest*'s 15 years that it's not a comic book per se, even though it wears the clothes of a comic book. We sell books in mainstream bookstores, we're looking to have a film happen, we're looking to do children's books based on *ElfQuest,* and everything that lets people know that the story is here and what the story is about is a good thing. Lately, comics seems to be polarizing into a couple of well-defined, noisy camps. On the one hand, you have the big players, what we used to call the "mainstream." On the other side, you have the small, very vocal, mostly politically-driven, what we've been trying to call the "alternatives." There is some merit to both positions, but I don't think that either of those camps is really taking advantage of the power of storytelling that this medium represents. Sometimes I think despairingly, and sometimes I think proudly, that we — Warp Graphics — are about the only ones who are sitting somewhere in the middle saying, "All right, you're there, and *you're* over there, and we're *here*, and we're going to go *there*, and neither of you are *there*, but we'll be there, and we'll see ya there."

CRAIG: *I think I followed that.*

RICHARD: We're having a very good time doing what we're doing. I think for the first time in 15 years we've crystallized decisions to let people play in our sandbox, to open up the world, to become a little bit more tribal in our own outlook, how we relate as people within a company, and as a company to the world outside. It is just wonderful! A lot of people complained about 1993, it was a terrible year, it was a tumultuous year — but we had a great year! And 1994 is going to be better. It is wonderful to have a vision, and to find out that there are people who share that vision. And more and more, we keep learning that.

CRAIG: New Blood – *I've noticed you co-write that, but the way the characters are acting, for example, is very differ-*

ABOVE: *A page from Wendy and Richard's "Welcome to the Worldpool" in* ElfQuest: New Blood Summer Special *#1*
INSET: *Wendy's back cover to* The ElfQuest Gatherum, *volume two*

ent from what I remember in the normal ElfQuest. *It's a lot more violent, for starters. Actually killing elves... It's a big change*

WENDY: You'll have to blame me for that one. That was my story idea, and that storyline was begun back in *Hidden Years* #4 before we did the hardcover collection. I did one panel that told of a war that took place between the Go-Backs and the Sun Folk in the Sun Village over the little palace. Barry saw that panel, and that is the single panel that sparked the entire new quest that he's doing. But no, I don't think it's more violent, because of course you read the early series, you know that the elves had been involved with violence and war before, and very graphically. So nothing that's happening currently is anything that hasn't happened before. In *ElfQuest* we've always dealt honestly with violence when it was a necessary part of the story. It may be that you've only read Barry's "War" issues and haven't read beyond that to where he's actually starting the quest. But he is taking the younger characters, for example, Strongbow's son, Dart, and treating this character much as we treated the young, teenaged Cutter, when he first began *his* quest.

RICHARD: Let me just put a little point on that. We've gotten letters on those issues, about the seeming violence. Some of those letters have said, "You've got elves killing elves, and that's not supposed to happen." What's happening, we're finding out, is that people are remembering that the Wolfriders have a very strong code about this. They're the ones who say, "No elf must die, even if he is my enemy." But the particular characters involved in the raid on the Sun Village, the ones that we have named the Go-Backs, they don't have any such code. They're pretty degenerate characters. I think the wonder of such a story as Barry is doing is exemplified by two letters that we got that will appear in the letters column of a later issue. One was from a group of seven- to ten-year-old kids who said, "We love *ElfQuest*, but it's kind of violent and it's making us very uncomfortable. Because that's not how it's supposed to be." They had a point, but the letter that follows is from a Vietnam vet who wrote in and said, "This story made me real uncomfortable, and I hope that's what you wanted to do, because war stinks, it's ugly, it's stupid, and I was involved in it, and if it makes other people uncomfortable, good for you." I thought, "Yesss!"

WENDY: That's been our whole point about violence all along. When you have these charming, appealing characters engaged in acts that really make you uncomfortable, I think it really drives the point home.

CRAIG: *What would you do if, for example, Barry wanted to do something really bizarre?*

WENDY: Name it.

CRAIG: *Let's say one of the young guys is gay or something*

WENDY: That's very likely.

CRAIG: *If he wanted to do something like this, how much freedom would he have?*

WENDY: Naturally, because of Barry's past work, this issue was bound to come up.

RICHARD: The question has come up before: "Why don't you show openly gay characters?" or this or that persuasion. Our response has always been, "They're there, but understand that there are no such labels in this culture, so anything we show is probably going to be a lot more subtle than you're expecting."

WENDY: Look. I'm going to do something radical, since this is the *Journal*. I'm going to come right out and say that every single blasted one of our characters is bisexual. They just don't have any gender problem. They're *elves*, for godssake! It doesn't make any sense for a race of immortal, non-human beings to have the same value system, especially when it comes to fidelity and gender preference, that we humans do. All of our thinking is based on the fact that we're *mortal*. We have to think about reproducing, we have to think about genetics, inbreeding, we have to worry about a ton of stuff that these characters don't. They *can't* breed as frequently as they'd like to. So sex means an entirely different thing to them — it's mostly for fun. And if it's mostly for fun, and they don't have the disease problems we do, and they don't have the fidelity problems we do because everybody is telepathic, so they'd know each other's thoughts, then they're going to have a different attitude towards it. And it's about time that everybody just realized that our characters are different from humans.

RICHARD: The problem is, as Wendy pointed out, we're mortal. We want everything now. We want instant gratification. Particularly in this culture, we're such a fast food culture in this country, if we can't go out and get it inside of 30 seconds, we're not interested. So people write in and say, "I want to see gay characters. I want to see bisexual characters." Well, Barry has already put in some scenes in his issues of *New Blood*, of Dart and a male, whether it's friend, lover, confidante, it doesn't matter.

WENDY: He calls him his "soul brother."

RICHARD: It doesn't matter. There were scenes of them holding hands — it could have been love, it could have been sexual, it could have been affection — it didn't matter. But we got such positive response, just from that acknowledgment. The people who wrote in didn't have to see them humping each other. It's just simply that *ElfQuest* acknowledged that this exists. And *ElfQuest* will *never* be that prurient or that blatant or that gratuitous. But we will always strive to be that honest.

CRAIG: *But let's say the writer of "Shards" wants to have one of the characters fall in love with a human, okay? Would he have to check with you on this?*

WENDY: Yes.

RICHARD: Both Wendy and I maintain a strict, without being restrictive, overview of what *ElfQuest* is. It's that vision that I mentioned earlier. There's a business vision that we have, and there's also a storytelling vision. There are some things that the characters just would not do.

WENDY: I'll give you a perfect example of where we put our foot down with one of our artists. This was in *WaveDancers*

ABOVE: *One big happy family, from* The ElfQuest Gatherum, *volume two*

OPPOSITE TOP: *Art from the end of* ElfQuest, *volume two, previewing volume three*

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *Wendy (in full Red Sonja regalia) and Richard in earlier days.*

The writers had written a scene where the characters were making a rather snickering joke about something sexual, okay? Richard got on them and said, "Elves don't act like this. They don't joke about sex or have any off-color humor because it doesn't mean the same thing to them, and it doesn't have all the taboos around it."

RICHARD: This was a couple of adolescent characters, and they're coming into puberty. They were giggling about something just the way kids in junior high school or whenever puberty starts these days, probably third grade, do. I just made the point that, "Are you reflecting the way elves think? Or are you reflecting something that you are associating with the way you've seen human beings think and act?" They said, "Oh! Yeah." At this point, nobody knows *ElfQuest* the way Wendy and I do.

CRAIG: *Obviously not.*

RICHARD: And maybe nobody ever will quite that well, although people are coming closer and closer. Barry's quite good at putting his mind inside these characters' heads. So we do keep that shepherd function. And when somebody strays a little bit too far out of the fold, we guide them back.

WENDY: I can tell you a rather sad story. I won't mention names, but it involves a couple of extremely talented young artists. When *New Blood* was just getting off the ground and was a more experimental book, we put out the word that we were looking for stories that didn't necessarily stick to *ElfQuest* canon, that we were looking for different points of view on *ElfQuest*. These two young and incredibly talented fellas spent six months putting together a proposal for us for a mini-series. Because I want to preserve the anonymity, I won't tell you anything that went on in this mini-series except to say that it was *way* out of line, it killed off major characters. It was more of a betrayal of the regular readers than we felt could be countenanced at that time. The fantasy was just very wild and wasn't quite as controlled as the type of fantasy we've done in *ElfQuest* for so many years. It hurt these young guys' feelings very, very badly that we said no, and we offered them other work, we wanted to work with them because of their talent, but they were so badly hurt by our rejection, that they just didn't want to work with us anymore, and I consider that a tragedy. But this is an example of where we will put our foot down. If we ever received a submission like that, ad I don't care who it was from — if Jack Kirby came back to life and gave us a submission like that, we'd say no.

CRAIG: *Is there anything else you wanted to clear up or get out?*

RICHARD: There's nothing to "clear up." As far as *ElfQuest* is concerned, people get it or they don't. Or they give it a try and get it, or they don't. We've been here 15 years, this is our 16th year. We're one of the old-timers of the alternative press, and there aren't very many of us. We fully intend to be here past the millennium doing what we do. It's just that big, and that much fun.

WENDY: There is one more can of worms I would like to open. That being that lately I would have to say in some cases we've observed history being rewritten in certain publications. Certain interviews take place about the alternative or independent press, and we get ignored. *ElfQuest* just has a devil of a time getting taken seriously by a lot of the comics press. I think it has to do with just the subject matter. It's been trivialized and glossed over, and people haven't really *looked* at it. I can tell you a story from *years* ago: Kim Thompson came to visit us back when we were in our oldest office. I was working on the original Quest, and I was in the middle of the war scenes and extremely proud of some inking I had done, and I held it under Kim's nose and said, "Kim, I know how you feel about elves, but just take a look at this inking! Look at this!" Because it really was great! And Kim goes, "Yeah well, I know, but honestly Wendy, it's the elves. I can't get past the elves." And to tell you the truth, that's how *ElfQuest* has been treated a lot, for years and years. People just have a lot of trouble getting past the elves and seeing the humanity in the story, and seeing that really, we could have done Chipmunk Quest — it doesn't matter that they're elves.

CRAIG: *They're not elves, really.*

WENDY: Well, they're sort of elves. They're our interpretation of elves. But people look at the big eyes and the fluffy hair and the little, squat bodies, and I guess they get turned off because it's too cute or something, or they shouldn't be reading it, they should be reading something ballsy, like *The Punisher*, which is so valuable and will be around in the next 400 years as an example of society's flower. [laughs] God bless Kim, he's a sweetheart, but I knew, the minute he said that to me, that we were probably going to be hearing that for as long as we did *ElfQuest*. And very often you'll see it in the fan press, they'll give us a nod, and they'll say, "While we respect the Pinis' contribution, we just really don't take *ElfQuest* very seriously."

RICHARD: And that's when they acknowledge it at all. Something I alluded to earlier is that it seems we're not really in comics, and you have the big, juggernaut mainstreams over here and the small, feisty alternatives over here. For a little while it seemed like pulling teeth to get the various and sundry magazines to listen. "Hey, you're doing something on the alternative press. What are we? Chopped liver? We helped *start* this bloody damn movement!" But we're bigger than the small guys, and smaller than the big guys, and we're not as noisy as some of the noisier ones, and we're noisier than some of the quiet ones, and it's going to be our epitaph.

WENDY: We do stories about love and healing, and you'll have to admit that those themes are not what you usually see in comics, be they alternative or not. I think a lot of people simply aren't used to dealing with subject matter like that. Maybe they look at it as too feminine, but I'm certainly not going to apologize for that.

CRAIG: *And there isn't any reason you should.* ●

"It doesn't matter that they're elves."

WHERE TO FIND THE

ALABAMA

Opening Books
403 Pratt Ave. N.E.
Huntsville, AL 35801
(205) 536-3580

ARIZONA

Stalking Moon Comics
6402 W. Glendale Ave. #1
Glendale, AZ 85301
(602) 931-0068

Atomic Comics
1318 W. Southern #9
Mesa, AZ 85202
(602) 649-0807

AAA Best Comics Etc.
8336 N. 7th Street #B-C
Phoenix, AZ 85020
(602) 997-4012

All About Books and Comics I
517 E. Camelback
Phoenix, AZ 85012
(602) 277-0757

All About Books and Comics II
4208 W. Dunlap
Phoenix, AZ 85051
(602) 435-0410

All About Books and Comics III
13835 N. Tatum, Suite #1
Phoenix, AZ 85032
(602) 494-1067

Southend Comics
12020 S. Warner-Elliot Pl. #105
Phoenix, AZ 85044
(602) 893-1380

The One Book Shop
120 E. University Dr.
Tempe, AZ 85281
(602) 967-3551

ARKANSAS

Paperbacks Plus
2207 Rogers Ave.
Fort Smith, AR 72901
(501) 785-5642

The Comic Book Store
9307 Treasure Hill
Little Rock, AR 72207
(501) 228-8777

Collector's Edition
3217 John F. Kennedy
North Little Rock, AR 72116
(501) 791-4222

TNT Collectors Hut
503 W. Hale
Osceola, AR 72370
(501) 563-5760

CALIFORNIA

Comic Relief
2138 University Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94704
(510) 843-5002

Comics & Comix
2461 Telegraph Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94704
(510) 845-4062

Dolly's Comics
336 Broadway #25
Chico, CA 95928
(916) 891-0349

Comics & Comix
6135 Sunrise Blvd.
Birdcage Walk
Citrus Heights, CA 95610
(916) 969-0717

Flying Colors
Comics & Other Cool Stuff
2980 Treat Blvd.
Concord, CA 94518
(510) 825-5410

Comics & Comix
Solano Mall, #1459B
1350 Travis Blvd.
Fairfield, CA 94533
(707) 427-1202

Land of Oohs & Aahs
17170 E. Brookhurst St.
Fountain Valley, CA 92708
(714) 963-3591

Geoffrey's Comics
15530 Crenshaw
Gardena, CA 90249
(310) 538-3198

Shooting Star Comics
815 E. Colorado Blvd. Unit #C
Glendale, CA 91205
(818) 502-1535

Pat Krueger's Comics
643 W. Alosta
Glendora, CA 91740
(818) 914-0544

Andromeda Bookshop
5756 Calle Real
Goleta, CA 93117
(805) 967-8880

Clay's Comics
924 A Street
Hayward, CA 94541
(510) 733-9833

The Comic & Card Vault
25100 Mission Blvd., Suite A
Hayward, CA 94544
(510)733-2373

Great Cards & Comics
1305 Imperial Beach Blvd.
Imperial Beach, CA 91932
(619) 424-8050

David's Comic Book Store
25433 Trabuco #101
Lake Forest /
El Toro, CA 92630
(714) 837-3767

Captain Blue Hen
1800 Lincoln Hwy. East
Lancaster, CA 17602
(717) 397-8011

Top Flight Comix
7905 Broadway
Lemon Grove, CA 91945
(619) 466-1205

Richard Kyle, Books
242 East Third St.
Long Beach, CA 90802
(310) 432-1182

Another World
1615 Colorado Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90041
(213) 257-7757

Golden Apple
7711 Melrose Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90046
(213) 658-6047

Bonanza Books & Comics
813 W. Roseburg Ave.
Modesto, CA 95350
(209) 529-0415

Adventure Comics and Toys
825 Cannery Row, Suite 103
Monterey, CA 93940
(408) 375-3583

Continental Comics
17032 Devonshire St.
Northridge, CA 91325
(818) 366-8909

Dr. Comics & Mr. Games
4014 Piedmont Ave.
Oakland, CA 94611
(510) 601-7800

21st Century Comics
814 W. Chapman Ave.
Orange, CA 92668
(714) 633-3440

Comics & Comix
405 California Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94306
(415) 328-8100

Lee's Comics
3783 El Camino Real
Palo Alto, CA 94306
(415) 493-3957

Comic Book Box
1A 4th Street
Petaluma, CA 94952
(707) 765-6930

Comics & Comix
5050 Rocklin Road #9
Rocklin, CA 95677
(916) 632-2389

A-1 Comics
5800 Madison Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95841
(916) 331-9203

Beyond the Pale
2029 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 441-PALE

Comics & Comix
921 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 442-5142

Comics, Etc.
5160 Mira Mesa Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92126
(619) 566-2255

Comic Relief
1597 Haight Street
San Francisco, CA 94117
(415) 552-9010

Comics & Comix
650 Irving
San Francisco, CA 94122
(415) 665-5888

Comics & Comix
700 Lombard
San Francisco, CA 94133
(415) 982-3511

Comix Experience
305 Divisadero St.
San Francisco, CA 94117
(415) 863-9258

The Funny Papers
5957 Geary Blvd.
San Francisco, CA 94121
(415) 752-1914

A World of Fantasy
963 S. Bascom Ave.
San Jose, CA 95128
(408) 279-8070

Comic Collector Shop
73 E. San Fernando
San Jose, CA 95113
(408) 287-2254

Comics Pendragon
1189 Branham Lane
San Jose, CA 95118
(408) 275-3233

Comics on Parade
933 State St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 965-2400

Hi De Ho Comics & Fantasy
525 Santa Monica Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90401
(310) 394-2820

Forbidden Planet
14513 Ventura Blvd.
Sherman Oaks, CA 91403
(818) 995-0151

R & K Comics and Cards
984A El Camino Real
Sunnyvale, CA 94087
(408) 732-477

KomicKaze
115 W. Main
Turlock, CA 95380
(209) 634-0442

Comics, Toons 'N' Toys
1055 E. Main
Tustin, CA 92680
(714) 730-2117

Hi De Ho Comics & Fantasy
64 Windward Avenue
Venice, CA 90291
(310) 399 6206

Ralph's Comic Corner
2377 E. Main Street
Ventura, CA 93003
(805) 653-2732

COLORADO

Time Warp
1711 Pearl Street
Boulder, CO 80302
(303) 443-4500

Colorado Comic Book Co.
220 N. Tejon St.
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
(719) 635-2516

All In A Dream
2901 E. Colfax
Denver, CO 80206
(303) 333-8615

Time Warp II
647 South Boulder Rd.
Louisville, CO 80027
(303) 666-0325

CONNECTICUT

Dream Factory
3161 Chapel Street
New Haven, CT 06511
(203) 776-8861

Book Exchange
327 New Britain Ave.
Plainville, CT 06062
(203) 747-0070

DELAWARE

Captain Blue Hen
Boyscourt Plaza, Route 113
Dover, DE 19901
(302) 734-3222

Comics & Robots
609 Philadelphia Pike
Wilmington, DE 19809
(302) 762-1239

FLORIDA

Time Machine II
5748 14 Street W.
Bradenton, FL 34207
(813) 758-3684

World of Books / Comics
147 Volusia Ave.
Daytona Beach, FL 32114
(904) 255-4383

Cliff's Books
209 N. Woodland Blvd.
DeLand, FL 32720
(904) 736-5464

Ray the Trader's
1710 S.W. 13th St.
Gainesville, FL 32608
(904)378-8808

Colisseum of Comics
1180 E. Vine Street
Kissimmee, FL 34744
(407) 870-5322

A & M Comics & Books
6650 S.W. 40th St.
Miami, FL 33155
(305) 661-3406

SAM Comics and Graphic Novels
12786 West Dixie Hwy.
North Miami, FL 33161
(305) 895-8763
Fax (305) 891-5815

Book Gallery
6610 Silver Star Road
Orlando, FL 32818
(407) 297-5700

Cartoon Museum
4300 S. Semoran Blvd.,
Suite 109
Orlando, FL 32822
(407) 273-0141

World of Books
5606 Ridgewood Ave.
Pt. Orange, FL 32019
(904) 761-4537

Comic & Gaming Exchange
8432 W. Oakland Park Blvd.
Sunrise, FL 33351
(305) 742-0777

New England Comics
221 East Davis Blvd.
Tampa, FL 33606
(813) 254-8088

New England Comics
Northdale Court Mall
15836 North Dale Mabry Hwy
Tampa, FL 33618
(813) 264-1848

GEORGIA

Bizarro-Wuxtry
225 College Ave.
Athens, GA 30601
(706)548-7806

Comic Strip
5055-A Memorial Dr.
Atlanta, GA 30083
(404) 292-9932

Oxford Comics
2395 Peachtree Road N.E.
Atlanta, GA 30305
(404) 233-8682

Criminal Records
1161 Euclid Ave. NE
Atlanta, GA 30307
(404) 215-9511

Comic Company
1958 Mistletoe Road
Decatur, GA 30033
(404) 248-9846

Titan Games and Comics
3853-C Lawrenceville Highway
Tucker, GA 30084
(404) 491-8067

Starbase One
2112 N. Ashley Street
Valdosta, GA 31602
N/A

HAWAII

Gecko Books & Comics
3713 Waialae Ave.
Honolulu, HI 96816
(808) 732-1292

Compleat Comics Company
1728 Kaahumanu Ave.
Wailuku, HI 96793
(808) 242-5875

IDAHO

New Mythology Comics & SF
1725 Broadway
Boise, ID 83706
(208) 334-8744

ILLINOIS

Amazing Fantasy Books and Comics
582 Torrence Ave.
Calumet City, IL 60409
(708) 891-2260

Campus Comics
821 S. Illinois Avenue
Carbondale, IL 62901
(618) 457-501

Comic Cavalcade
502 E. John
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 384-2211

Halley's Comix
3401 N. Pauline
Chicago, IL 60657
(312)477-3555

Larry's Comic Book Store
1219 W. Devon Ave.
Chicago, IL 60660
(312) 274-1832

Moondog's
Ford City Mall
76th & Cicero Avenues
Chicago, IL
(312) 581-6060

Moondog's
Lincoln Park
2301 N. Clark St.
Chicago, IL
(312) 248-6060

Quimby's Queer Store
1328 North Damen Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622
(312) 342-0910

GEM Comics
156 N. York Road
Elmhurst, IL 60126
(708) 833-8787

Amazing Fantasy Books and Comics
47 E. Lincoln Hwy.
Frankfort, IL 60423
(815) 469-5092

Action Comics & Games
1637 Waukegan Road
Glenview, IL 60025
(708) 724-1111

Time Travelers
2610 23rd Ave.
Moline, IL 61265
(309) 797-4993

Moondog's
139 W. Prospect Ave.
Mt. Prospect, IL
(708) 398-6060

Moondog's
Randhurst Mall
Elmhurst & Rand Roads
Mt. Prospect, IL
(708) 577-8668

Scottie's Comics
2200 Broadway
Mt. Vernon, IL 62864
(618) 242-8805

Atlas Comics Inc.
4735 N. Cumberland
Norridge, IL 60656
(708) 453-2110

Acme Books and Comics
1241 W. Main
Peoria, IL 61606
(309) 676-4530

Moondog's
Schaumburg Plaza
1455 W. Schaumburg
Schaumburg, IL
(708) 529-6060

Amazing Fantasy Books I and Comics
15948 Park Center Plaza
Tinley Park, IL 60477
(708) 532-0837

INDIANA

Book Broker
2127 S. Weinbach Ave.
Evansville, IN 47714
(812) 479-5647

Comic Carnival
6265 N. Carrollton Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46220
(317) 253-8882

Comic Carnival
7311 U.S. 31 South
Indianapolis, IN 46225
(317) 889-8899

Comic Carnival
5002 S. Madison Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46227
(317) 787-3773

Comic Carnival
982 N. Mitthoeffer Road
Indianapolis, IN 46229
(317) 898-5010

Comic Carnival
3837 N. High School Road
Indianapolis, IN 46254
(317) 293-4386

Ready B-4 Books
524 Main Street
Lafayette, IN 47901
(317) 742-1350

IOWA

Oakleaf Comics
1926 Valley Park Drive
Cedar Falls, IA 50613
(319) 277-1835

KANSAS

Agents of C.O.M.I.C.S.
601 N. West #200
Wichita, KS 67203
(316) 94COMIC

Air Capital Comic & Games
954 S. Oliver
Wichita, KS 67218-3216
(316) 681-0219

KENTUCKY

Hypnotic Eye
504 Euclid Ave.
Lexington, KY 40502
(606) 255-8987

Comic Book World
6905 Shepherdsville Road
Louisville, KY 40219
(502) 964-5500

The Great Escape
2433 Bardstown Road
Louisville, KY 40205
(502) 456-2216

LOUISIANA

GB Comics
5036 Fairfield Street
Metairie, LA 70006
(504) 887-2885

Family Books & Comics
8016 W. Metairie
Metairie, LA 70003
(504) 469-3985

Cardco
Murray Place Shopping Center
1611 North 18th St.
Monroe, LA 71201
(318) 387-4577

Tom's Triple Play 2
5252 Mansfield Rd.
Shreveport, LA 71118
(318) 687-8153

MAINE

Nostalgia, Inc.
576 Stillwater Ave.
Bangor, ME 04401
(207) 947-5802

Idle Worship
585 Congress St.
Portland, ME 04101
(207) 874-6874

Moonshadow Comics
357 Maine Mall Rd.
South Portland, ME 04106
(207) 772-4605

Casablanca Comics
775 Roosevelt Trail,
Don Rich Plaza
Windham, ME 04062
(207) 892-0056

MARYLAND

Atomic Books Inc.
229 W. Read St.
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 728-5490

Big Planet Comics
4908 Fairmont Ave.
Bethesda, MD 20814
(301) 654-6856

Alternate Worlds
72 Cranbrook Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030
(410) 666-3290

The Closet of Comics
7319 Baltimore Ave.
College Park, MD 20740
(301) 699-0498

MASSACHUSETTS

Ayer Comics
28 Main Street
Ayer, MA 01432
(508) 772-4994

New England Comics
168 Harvard Ave.
Allston, MA 02134
(617) 783-1848

Comicopia
464 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215
(617)266-4266

New England Comics
1940 Centre Street
West Roxbury
Boston, MA 02132
(617) 325-1848

New England Comics
E. Crossing Plaza
748 Crescent St.
Brockton, MA 02402
(508) 559-5068

New England Comics
Coolidge Corner
316 Harvard St.
Brookline, MA 02146
(617)-566-0115

Million Year Picnic
Galleria Mall
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 492-6763

New England Comics
Harvard Square
12B Eliot St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 354-5352

That's Entertainment
387 Main St.
Fitchburg, MA 01420
(508) 342-8607

Bop City Comics
Route 9, Marshall's Mall
Framingham, MA 01701
(508)872-2317

Same Bat Channel #2
Hampshire Mall
Hadley, MA 01035
(413) 586-8776

New England Comics
12A Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148-5110
(617) 322-2404

New England Comics
732 Washington Street
Norwood, MA 02062
(617) 769-4552

New England Comics
1 Court St.
Plymouth, MA 02360
(508) 746-8797

New England Comics
1350 Hancock St.
Quincy, MA 02169
(617) 770-1848

Pages Bookshop of Reading
25 Haven St.,
Reading Square
Reading, MA 01867
(617) 944-9613

New England Comics
Fast Subscription Service
P.O. Box 310
Quincy MA 02269

That's Entertainment
151 Chandler St.
Worcester, MA 01609
(508) 755-4207

The Outer Limits
457 Moody Street
Waltham, MA 02154
(617) 891-0444

MICHIGAN

Dave's Comics & Collectibles
623 E. William
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(313) 665-6969

Comics Plus
14218 Michigan
Dearborn, MI 48126
(313) 582-9444

Tardy's Collector's Corner, Inc.
2009 Eastern Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
(616) 245-7628

Nostalgia, Ink
135 E. Michigan Ave.
Jackson, MI 49201
(517) 784-8855

Classic Movie & Comic Center
19047 Middlebelt
Livonia, MI 48152
(313) 476-1254

Readers
31234 W. Warren Ave.
Westland, MI 48185
(313) 525-5400

Between the Covers
2313 Lee St. SW
Wyoming, MI 49509
(616) 531-5181

MINNESOTA

Comic Book College
3151 Hennepin Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55408
(612) 822-2309

Dream Haven Books & Comics
1309 4th St. SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414
(612) 379-8924

Shinders Read More
733 Hennepin Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55407
(612) 333-3628

MISSISSIPPI

Star Store
4212 N. State St.
Jackson, MS 39206
(601) 362-8001

MISSOURI

The Fantasy Shop, Inc.
203 N. Kirkwood
Kirkwood, MO 63122
(314) 965-3231

The Fantasy Shop, Inc.
437 N. Main St.
St. Charles, MO 63301
(314) 947-8330

Star Clipper Books
6143 Delmar Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63130
(314) 725-9110

Star Clipper Books
10955 Olive Street Road
St. Louis, MO 63141
(314) 567-9122

NEBRASKA

Cosmic Comics
280 N. 66th, Suite 206A
Lincoln, NE 68505
(402) 467-2727

Cosmic Comics
5400 S. 56th, Suite 4
Lincoln, NE 68516
(402) 423-2584

NEVADA

Dreamwell Comics
5706 W. Charleston
Las Vegas, NV 89102
(702) 870-1256

Page After Page
1456 East Charleston Blvd.
Las Vegas, NV 89104
(702) 384-1690

Fandom's Comic World
2001 East Second St.
Reno, NV 89502
(702) 786-6663

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Dover Cards and Comics
11 Main Street
Dover, NH 03820
(603) 749-6862

Comics, Etc.
28 Roxbury St.
Keene, NH 03431
(603) 352-2624

Comic Store
643 Elm Street
Manchester, NH 03101
(603) 668-6705

Comic Store
300 Main Street
Nashua, NH 03060
(603) 881-4855

NEW JERSEY

Little Shop of Comics
First Fidelity Plaza, Route 9
Bayville, NJ 08721
(908) 269-9458

Steve's Comic Relief
1555 St. George Ave.
Colonia, NJ 07067
(908) 382-3736

Steve's Comic Relief
24 Mill Run Plaza
Delran, NJ 08075
(609) 461-1770

Ron's Gallery of Collectibles Inc. No.2
2177 Woodbridge Ave.
Edison, NJ 08817
(908) 985-9210

The Joker's Child
12-70 River Road
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
(201) 794-6830

Star Spangled Comics
353 Route 22
King George Plaza
Green Brook, NJ 08812
(908) 356-8338

Steve's Comic Relief
165 Mercer Mall
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
(609) 452-7548

Middle Earth
400 Bloomfield Ave.
Montclair, NJ 07042
(201) 744-6594

Montclair Book Center
221 Glenridge Ave.
Montclair, NJ 07042
(201) 783-3630

Comic World
8 W. Camden Ave.
Moorestown, NJ 08057
(609) 778-4332

Comic Explosion
339 Franklin Ave.
Nutley, NJ 07110
(201) 235-1336

Ron's Gallery of Collectibles Inc. No.1
231 W. Westfield Ave.
Roselle Park, NJ 07204
(908) 245-0951

Steve's Comic Relief
635 Bay Ave.
Toms River, NJ 08753
(908) 244-5003

Tom Dee
1201 Blackhorse Pk.
Turnersville, NJ 08012
(609) 228-8645

NEW YORK

Earthworld
327 Central Ave.
Albany, NY 12206
(518) 465-5495

Midnight Comics
232 Lark Street
Albany, NY 12210
(518) 433-1251

The Incredible Pulp
2140 Grand Ave.
Baldwin, NY 11510
(516) 223-0658

C O M I C S   J O U R N A L

Metro Comics
138 Montague Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 935-0911

Queen City Bookstore II
3218 Transit Road
Depew, NY 14043
(716) 668-5061

Collector's Kingdom
282 W. Jericho Turnpike
Huntington Station, NY 11746
(516) 427-8087

Comic Art Gallery
940 3rd Ave.
New York, NY 10022
(212) 759-6255

Comics for Sale
169 W. 72th
New York, NY 10023
(212) 787-7943

Jim Hanley's Universe
166 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007
(212) 349-2930

Jim Hanley's Universe
126 West 32nd Street
New York, NY 10001
(212) 268-7088

St. Mark's Comics
11 St. Mark's Place
New York, NY 10003
(212) 598-9439

Village Comics
163 Bleecker St.
New York, NY 10012
(212) 777-2770

West Side Comics
107 W. 86th Street
New York, NY 10024
(212) 724-0432

The Compleat Strategist
11 East 33 Street
New York City, NY 10016
(212) 685-3880

Fantasy Headquarters
2203 30th Ave.
New York City, NY 11236
(718) 372-3663

Forbidden Planet
821 Broadway
New York City, NY 10003
(212) 473-1815

Forbidden Planet
227 E. 59th Street
New York City, NY 10022
(212) 751-4386

L & S Comix
1378 Jerusalem Ave.
North Merrick, NY 11566
(516) 486-XMEN

House of Fantasy
Comics and Games
738 Webster St.
North Tonawanda, NY
14120-481
(716) 694-8783

Cosmic Comics
241 Merrick Road
Oceanside, NY 11572
(516) 763-1133

Skullsheader
3160 Lawson Blvd.
Oceanside, NY 11572
(516) 536-7800

Adventure Inn
475 Bedford Road
Pleasantville, NY 10570
(914) 741-2510

Empire Comics
1176 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, NY 14620
(716) 442-0371

Fourth World Comics
414 Country Road
St. James, NY 11780
(516) 584-5385

Amazing Comics
12 Gillette Avenue
Sayville, NY 11782
(516) 567-8069

Electric City Comics
1704 Van Vranken Avenue
Schenectady, NY 12308
(518) 377-1500

Jim Hanley's Universe
350 New Dorp Lane
Staten Island, NY 10306
(718) 351-6299

Twilight Book & Game
1401 N. Salina Street
Syracuse, NY 13208
(315) 471-3139

Twilight Book & Game II
Marshall Square Mall
Syracuse, NY 13210
(315) 472-5061

NORTH CAROLINA

Books Do Furnish A Room
1809 West Markham Ave.
Durham, NC 27705
(919) 286-1076

Parts Unknown
801 Merritt Drive
Greensboro, NC 27407
(919) 294-0081

The Nostalgia News Stand
919 Dickinson Ave.
Greenville, NC 27834
(919) 758-6929

OHIO

Kenmore Komics
1020 Kenmore Blvd.
Akron, OH 44314
(216) 745-5530

Spicy Books
506 W. Exchange St.
Akron, OH 44302
(216) 253-8052

Super City Comics
401 Euclid Ave. #283
Cleveland, OH 44114
(216) 696-8710

Monkey's Retreat
2400 N. High Street
Columbus, OH 43202
(614) 262-6511

Maverick's Comics
5600-V Dixie Highway
Fairfield, OH 45014
(513) 860-5805

Dave's Comics
and Collectibles
6118 High Street
Garrettsville, OH 44231
(216) 527-0432

JC Comics and Cards
857 Portage Trail
Stow, OH 44224
(216) 929-1929

Dark Star Books & Comics
231 Xenia Ave.
Yellow Springs, OH 45387
(513) 767-9400

OKLAHOMA

Planet Comics & SF
918 W. Main
Norman, OK 73069
(405) 329-9695

Comic Empire of Tulsa
3122 S. Mingo Road
Tulsa, OK 74146
(918) 664-5808

OREGON

MORE FUN
102 Will Dodge Way
Ashland, OR 97520
(503) 488-1978

Future Dreams
1800 East Burnside
Portland, OR 97214
(503) 231-8311

PENNSYLVANIA

Beachead Comics
1501 Chew Street
Allentown, PA 18102
(215) 437-6372

Comic Corner
Rt. 209 South,
Pleasant Valley Plaza
Brodheadsville, PA 18322
(717) 992-0024

Cap's Comic Cavalcade
1980 Catasauqua Road
Allentown, PA 18103
(215) 264-5540

Comic Vault
4672 Broadway
Allentown, PA 18104
(215) 395-0979

Time Tunnel
1001 Castle Shannon Blvd.
Castle Shannon, PA 15234
(412) 531-6833

Comic Express
Silver Spring Plaza
3546 Marietta Ave. #J-K
Lancaster, PA 17601
(717) 285-3040

Steve's Comic Relief
4153 Woerner Ave.
Levittown, PA 19057
(215) 945-7954

Steve's Comic Relief
3114 S. Eagle Road
Newtown, PA 18940
(215) 579-9225

Fat Jack's Comicrypt
2006 Sansom St.
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 963-0788

Steve's Comic Relief
1248 Franklin Mills Circle
Philadelphia, PA 19154
(215) 281-3730

BEM: The Store
622 South Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15221
(412) 243-2736

Eide's Entertainment
1111 Penn
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
(412) 261-0900

The Comic Store
2500 Plymouth Meeting Mall
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462
(215) 887-8141

Comic Swap
110 S. Fraser St.
State College, PA 16801
(814) 234-6005

Time Tunnel Comics
500 Exeter Ave.
West Pittston, PA 18643
(717) 655-5083

Dana Books
Collectors Emporium
92 Lee Park Ave.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702
(717) 824-7727

The Comic Store
Willow Grove Mall
Willow Grove, PA 19090
(215) 335-4409

The Comic Stop
1012 E. Willow Grove Ave.
Wyndmoor, PA 19118
(215) 233-4409

Comic Connection
1201 Carlisle Road
York, PA 17404
(717) 843-6616

RHODE ISLAND

Ocean State Comics
& Baseball Cards, Inc.
1048 Mineral Spring Ave.
North Providence, RI 02904
(401) 724-0875

Starship Excalibur
60 Washington St.
Providence, RI 02903
(401) 273-8390

Time Capsule Comics
2737 Post Road
Warwick, RI 02886
(401) 732-6007

SOUTH CAROLINA

Heroes & Dragons
1501 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29210
(803) 731-4376

TENNESSEE

Comics & Curios I
3472 Brainerd Rd.
Chattanooga, TN 37411
(615) 648-1710

Comics & Curios II
3801 Dayton Blvd.
Chattanooga, TN 37415
(615) 876-6698

Comics, Inc.
8415 Kingston Pk. Suite F
Knoxville, TN 37919
(615) 589-1051

Comics & Collectibles
4730 Poplar #2
Memphis, TN 38117
(901) 683-7171

TEXAS

Austin Books
5002 N. Lamar
Austin, TX 78751
(512) 454-4197

Europa Books
2406 Guadalupe
Austin, TX 78705
(512) 476-0423

Dollar Video & Pizza
613 Conrad Hilton Ave.
Cisco, TX 76437
(817) 442-1886

Heroes #1
6030 Highway 80 W.
Ft. Worth, TX 76116
(817) 244-2886

Heroes #2
2764 W. Berry St.
Ft. Worth, TX 76109
(817) 926-8803

Heroes #3
3718 Airport Freeway
Hurst, TX 76053
(817) 590-4855

Bedrock City Comic Co.
6521 Westheimer
Houston, TX 77057
(713) 780-0675

Alan's
2525 B Judson Road
Longview, TX 75601
(903) 753-0493

Star Books & Comics
2114 34th St.
Lubbock, TX 79411
(806)744-9150

The Book Center
& Comic Shop
218 Bonham
Paris, TX 75460
(903) 784-6225

Comics Unlimited
7181 Blanco road
San Antonio, TX 78216
(512) 340-0874

Excalibur Comics
3611 State Line Ave.
Texarkana, TX 75503
(903) 793-5767

UTAH

Captain Salamander's
275 N. University Ave.
Provo, UT 84601
(801) 374-8058

Night Flight
Cottonwood Mall
4835 S. Highland Dr.
Salt Lake City, UT 84117
(801) 272-8343

Comics Utah
2985 W. 3500 S.
West Valley, UT 84119
(801) 966-8581

VERMONT

Earth Prime Comics
154 Church Street
Burlington, VT
(802) 863-3666

Comics Route
Green Mountain Village Shops
Rt. 7A Main St net
Manchester Center, VT 05255
(802) 362-3896

VIRGINIA

Capital Comics Center
2008 Mt. Vernon Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22301
(703) 548-3466

Daydream Books
218-A W. Market Street
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(804) 971-6523

Marie's Books & Things
1701 Princess Anne Street
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
(703) 373-5196

Benders
22 S. Mallory Street
Hampton, VA 23663
(804) 723-3741

Trilogy Shop #2
700 E. Little Creek Road
Norfolk, VA 23518
(804) 587-2540

B & D Comic Shop
802 Elm Ave., SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
(703) 342-6642

Big Planet Comics
426 Maple Ave. East
Vienna, VA 22180
(703) 242-9412

WASHINGTON

Corner Comics & Books
6521 NE 181st
Kenmore, WA 98155
(206) 486-6836

Infinite Frontiers/Comics
1309 Columbia Center Blvd.
Richland, WA 99352
(509) 783-1571

Corner Comics II
5226 University Way NE
Seattle, WA 98105
(206) 525-9394

Fallout
1506 E. Olive Way
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 323-BOMB

Golden Age
Collectibles Ltd.
Pike Place Market
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 622-9799

Wonder World
Books & Gifts
465 SW 152nd St.
Seattle, WA 98166
(206) 433-0279

Zanadu Comics
1923 Third Ave.
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 443-1316

Zanadu Comics
1307 NE 45th Street
Seattle, WA 98105
(206) 632-0989

WISCONSIN

Rockhead's Comics & Games
2527 75th Street
Kenosha, WI 53143
(414) 657-5265

Capital City Comics
1910 Monroe Street
Madison, WI 53711
(608) 251-8445

20th Century Books
108 King Street
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 251-6226

Capital City Comics
2565 N. Downer Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53211
(414) 332-8199

Jim's Comics/
Skeltrax Video
263 Center Ave.
Yaesville, WI 53095
(888) 852-8000

NOTE TO RETAILERS:
If you'd like your store
listed in this feature,
please send your store
name, address, and
phone number to:
RETAILER LIST
c/o THE COMICS
JOURNAL, 7563 LAKE
CITY WAY NE, SEATTLE,
WA 98115

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

AUSTRALIA

Alternate Worlds-Albury
UA/451 Smith St.
Albury, New So. Wales 2640
Australia
(060) 415603
Fax: (060) 416689

Cloud Nine Comics
P.O. Box 677
Belmont, Victoria
Australia 3216
052-41-2286

Alternate Worlds-
Camberwell
744 Burke Rd.
Camberwell, Victoria 3124
Australia
(03) 882-0346
Fax: (03) 882-0346

Alternate Worlds
40 Chapel St.
Windsor, Victoria 3181
Australia
(03) 529-2255
Fax: (03) 529-2640

Impact Records
GPO Box 3044
Canberra, ACT
Australia 2601
06-247-4461

CANADA

Another Dimension
324-10 Street NW
Calgary, AB T2N 1V8
(403) 283-7078

Gotham Comics & Games
7305 Edmonds Street
Burnaby, BC V3N 1A7
(604) 520-6006

L.A. Comics & Books
371 Victoria St.
Kamloops, BC V2C 2A3
(604) 828-1995

Talkin' Illustrations
604-12th St.
New Westminster, BC V3M 4J4
(604) 521-8143

Talkin' Illustrations
9563-120th St.
North Delta, BC V4C 6S4
(604) 585-2393

The Comic Gallery
5118 Joyce Street
Vancouver, BC V5R 4G8
(604) 439-5865

The Comicshop
2089 W. 4th Ave.
Vancouver, BC V6J 1N3
(604) 738-8122

Kelley's Comics
345 Mountain Road
Moncton, NB E1C 2N5
(506) 855-6058

Silver Snail
391 Bank St.
Ottawa, ON K2P 1Y3
(613) 232-2808

The Beguiling
601 Markham St.
Toronto, ON M6G 2L7
(416) 533-9168

Silver Snail Comics
2386A Yonge Street
Toronto, ON M4P 2E6
(416) 481-4152

Silver Snail Comics
367 Queen St. West
Toronto, ON M5V 2A4
(416) 593-0889

Unknown Worlds
725 Danforth Ave.
Toronto, ON M4J 1L2
(416) 461-1887

Cosmix
931 Decarie
Montreal, PQ H4L 3M3
(514) 744-9494

Librairie Nebula
1452 St-Mathieu
Montreal, PQ H3H 2H9
(514) 932-3930

Librairie Fractions
27A, d'Auteuil
Vieux-Quebec, PQ G1R 4B9
(418) 692-3985

UNITED KINGDOM

Forbidden Planet
168 Buchanan Street
Glasgow G12LW, Scotland
041-331-1215

Forbidden Planet
71 New Oxford Street
London, England WC1A 1DG
071-379-6042

Sheffield Space Centre
33 The Wicker
Sheffield, South Yorks
England S3 8HS
074-265-8905

FINLAND

Kalunor
Rautatienkatu 14
33100 Tampere, FL 105
931-131287

FRANCE

Comics Megastore
31 Rue de la Monnaie
59800 Lille, France
20-06-51-51

GERMANY

Graber Verlag Internationale
Comic & Comic Gallerie
Zossener Strasse 32-33
1000 Berlin 61, Germany
030-693-64-13

Modern Graphics
Oranienstrasse 22
1000 Berlin 36, Germany
030-615-88-10

Wizard Comics
Ziegelhütte 3
W-6792
Ramstein,
Germany
063716-35-41

MEXICO

De Otro Mundo
Apdo. Postal
#167
Cd. Lopez Mateos
Edo. Mex, Mexico
52971
395-08-63

NETHERLANDS

Wonderland, Strips
& Science Fiction
Scarrbeerstraat 54a
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
1095 XC
31-20-694-35-42

NEW ZEALAND

Mark 1 Comics & Games
131 Queen Street
Auckland, New Zealand
(649) 3070215

SOUTH AFRICA

Fantasmania
38 Grant Ave.
Norwood, 2192
Johannesburg
483-3229

SWITZERLAND

Comix Shop
Theaterpassage
4051 Basel
Switzerland
0041-61-2716686

D I S T R I B U T O R S

The Comics Journal is distributed by

ANDROMEDA PUBLICATIONS LTD.
2113 Dundas St. West
Toronto, ON M6R 1X1
CANADA
(416) 535-9100

BOKCAFEEN
Hiemogt 3
0366 Oslo, NORWAY

BUD PLANT COMIC ART
PO Box 1689
Grass Valley, CA 95945
(916) 273-2166

CAPITAL CITY DISTRIBUTION, INC.
P.O. Box 8156
Madison, WI 53708
(608) 276-7777

COMICS HAWAII
94-025 Ukee Street #8
Waipahu, HI 96797
(808) 423-0295

COMICS UNLIMITED
161 Ellis St.
Staten Island, NY 10307
(718) 948-2223

DESERT MOON PERIODICALS
Albuquerque, New Mexico

DIAMOND DISTRIBUTORS
1966 Green Spring Drive
Timonium, MD 21093
(410) 560-7100

FANTASY DIST.
2831 Miller St.
San Leandro, CA 94577
(510) 352-5832

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS
7563 Lake City Way
Seattle, WA 98115
(206) 524-1967

FINE PRINT DISTRIBUTION
Austin, TX

FRIENDLY FRANK'S
3990 Broadway
Gary, Indiana 46408
(219) 884-5052

HEROES WORLD DISTRIBUTION CO.
961 Route 10 East
Randolph, NJ 07869
(201) 927-4447

INLAND MAGAZINES
East Haven, CT

LAMBIEK
Kerkstraat 78, Amsterdam,
THE NETHERLANDS
0-20-267543

LAST GASP
777 Florida Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 824-6636

MULTI-BOOK & PERIODICAL
4135 S. Service Rd.
Burlington, ON L7L 4X5
CANADA
(416) 632-5573

PACIFIC FANTASY
5522 E. Second St.
Long Beach, CA 90803
(310) 434-5136

SEE HEAR BOOKS
59 E. 7th Street,
New York, NY 10003
(212) 505-9781

STYX COMICS SERVICE
1858 Arlington St.
Winnipeg, MBA R2X 1W6
CANADA
(204) 586-8547

SUPERHERO ENTERPRISES
70 Morris St.
Morristown, NJ 07960
(201) 455-1211

TITAN DISTRIBUTORS LTD.
P.O. Box 250
London E3 3LT ENGLAND
(01) 538-8300

TRONSMO BOKHANDEL
Postboks 6697
St. Olavs Plass
N-0130 Oslo NORWAY
02-202509

UBIQUITY
New York, NY

Boom Boom continues to amaze.
-M. Thomas Inge
Comics as Culture

Sook-Yin was making apple sauce so she put some apples on the stove to boil then went upstairs. I stayed downstairs and began reading *Boom Boom* #1 – I'd gotten your package that day. I must've gotten really absorbed in it 'cause I was surrounded in smoke when Sook-Yin's cry of alarm from upstairs got me to look up. Sook-Yin was pretty mad at me for a while. She figured I'd intentionally let the apples burn 'cause she couldn't imagine that anyone could be so distracted that they'd let that amount of smoke develop. Anyway, I really enjoyed the book.
-Chester Brown

...so intelligent and convivial, it's almost an anomaly.
-Jim Woodring
from *JIM* #2

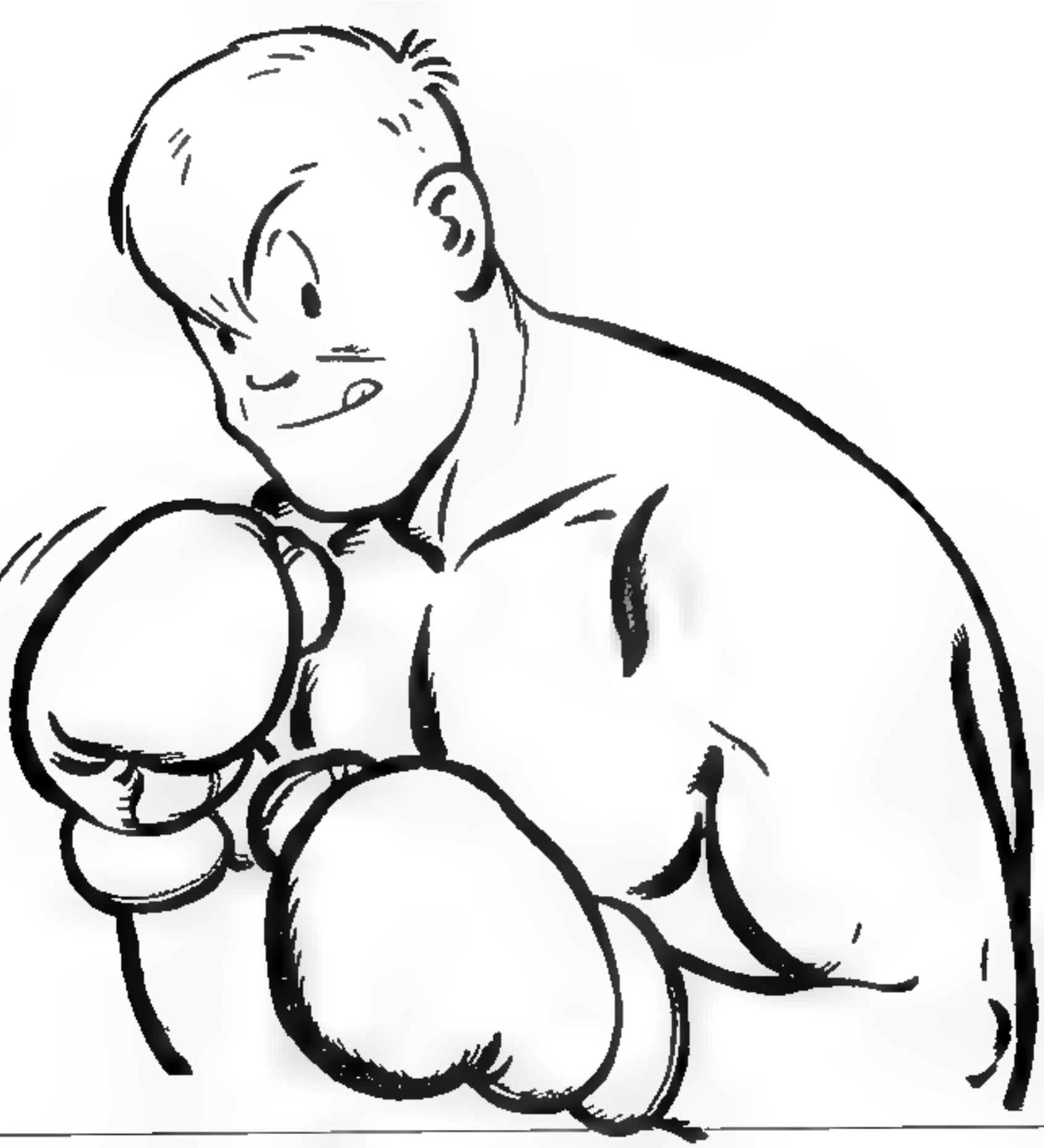
It's a total hot-shit comeek.
-Ariel Bordeaux
A.K.A. Deep Girl

BOOM BOOM #1

A comic book about zen, art, and lust.

For sample copy, send $3.25 to ÆON, 5014-D Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105. Don't forget to include your name and address. (Inquire for wholesale rates.)

For catalog of soon-to-be-rare BOOM BOOM minicomics contact. David Lasky, Box 181, 4505 University Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105



RERUNS & REVIVALS

Joe Palooka and the Most Famous Food Fight of the Funnies

By R.C. HARVEY

HAM FISHER'S *JOE PALOOKA* was without question one of the most popular comic strips of the '30s, '40s, and early '50s. Rehearsing the adventures of a good-hearted if somewhat simpleminded prize fighter (the world's heavyweight champion, in fact), the strip consistently placed among the top five comic strips in readership surveys. Right up there with *Blondie, Little Orphan Annie, Dick Tracy,* and *Li'l Abner* Fisher told action-oriented adventure stories, full of exotic incidents as well as a healthy dose of humor. And he was expert at prolonging the agonies he inflicted upon his characters, creating suspense-filled storylines the equal of any contrived by his compeers, however sadistically depraved they may have been. His fight scenes (of which there were necessarily many) were carefully and realistically staged. And the strip was well-drawn, meticulously so.

So why have we heard so little about Ham Fisher and *Joe Palooka*? We've had reprints of *Buck Rogers, Terry and the Pirates, Flash Gordon, Tarzan, Wash Tubbs, Little Nemo in Slumberland, Krazy Kat, Secret Agent X-9, Popeye, Prince Valiant, Little Orphan Annie, Dick Tracy,* and a few dozen more, in bits and pieces, here and yon. And *Li'l Abner*. All of *Li'l Abner* from 1934, when it started, to 1950 (so far — and more to come from Kitchen Sink Press). Probably the only big-name, historically significant strips that haven't been reissued in some form during the last two decades are *Blondie* and *The Katzenjammer Kids*. And *Joe Palooka*.

We've seen reruns of lesser-known strips like *Red Barry, Flying Jenny, Captain Midnight, Barney Baxter, Red Ryder, Jim Hardy, Buz Sawyer,* and even George Wunder's *Terry* (a recent, welcomed addition to the reprint roster, thanks to JAL Publications and Jeffrey Lindenblatt; JAL's *Missing Years* magazine picks up the continuity immediately after Milton Caniff left the strip at the end of 1946.) But still no *Palooka*.

Until now.

In the summer of 1992, Dave Clark's Classic Comics brought out a $15.95 volume that reprints *Palooka* strips from 1938 and 1943. Bound on the short side, the softcover book prints two daily strips to each 7"x11"-inch page, thereby providing a generous showcase for the visuals, and the stories Clark has chosen to reprint display Fisher's storytelling skill at its best — and in those years, Fisher was always at his best. The book's front matter has been selected with equal care. Clark picked a couple short articles about Fisher (including his obituary in *Editor and Publisher*, December 31, 1955) and a long informative piece by Robert

ABOVE: *Ham Fisher's hero, the big, good-natured, boxer Joe Palooka, from James Edgar's profile of Fisher in the August, 1950 issue of* Maclean's.

Boyle published by *Sports Illustrated* in April of 1965. And Ron Goulart contributes a short critique of the strip and its creator and his several ghosts.

Altogether, the package gives us an ample sample of this great strip. We meet Joe's long-suffering and voluble manager, Knobby Walsh, who loves Joe but always has an eye on gate

receipts, too, and Joe's fiancée, the beauteous blonde Ann Howe, whom the champ finally married on June 24, 1949, after an 18-year engagement. (It was in the air. Dick Tracy married Tess Trueheart on Christmas Eve, 1949, and Li'l Abner married Daisy Mae on March 29, 1952.) And we see redheaded Jerry Leemy, Joe's excitable wartime Army buddy, in action, ditto Joe's pre-war valet-factotum-sparring-partner, Smokey, one of the few black characters in comics at the time to be portrayed as something more than a racial caricature (although he was that, too, visually).

And then there's Joe himself. It isn't quite accurate to say he is simpleminded. But how else do you describe such an uncomplicated character?

Well, to begin with, he's big and strong. He is, after all, a professional boxer. His shoulders are broader than anyone else's in the strip. Except those of his opponents. He's also entirely, doggedly, wholesome. He's thoughtful, compassionate, and completely loyal. And humble, unrelentingly humble. He embodies clean living, clean talking, and clean thinking, not to mention honesty, courage, tolerance, and devotion to duty, country, mother, and apple pie. You see what I mean by "uncomplicated"?

Even his face is uncomplicated. It's absolutely plain, completely open and unassuming. Tiny nose, gigantic shock of forelock, wide-open eyes. It's the sort of face you expect on a man incapable of dissembling. Or of compromise. Or of anything mean, small, or even remotely unkind. With Joe Palooka, what you see is what you get. Simply stated, he is an ideal. An American idea of manhood. Or of knighthood, for that is what he is — a kindly, gracious knight, righter of wrongs, defender of truth, beauty, justice, and the American way.

These characters were the mainstays of Fisher's cast. Later, he would add the hugely comic heavyweight, Humphrey Pennyworth, a 300-pound village blacksmith with a heart of gold who is probably the only person who we are certain could defeat Palooka in the ring. And then there was Little Max, a mute nine-year-old street urchin who was the personification of cute with his big soulful eyes and his cast-off clothes too big for his diminutive form. He was so saccharine sweet that diabetics had to forego reading the strip whenever he appeared. But the general public doted on such characters in the days of yore, and Little Max added greatly to the popularity of the strip.

We see neither Humphrey nor Little Max in the book at hand, but Clark promises another volume if this one sells well enough, so we can hope.

The quality of the printing here is uneven. The strips seem shot from newspaper clippings (not proofs), so the imperfections produced by printing on porous newsprint are perpetuated here. And the inking of some pages is a little light. In short, the book is not a shining example of the printer's craft. But these are mostly quibbles.

In the last analysis, it doesn't matter much. The book's contents are all perfectly clear and legible. (And the pictures, even if occasionally flawed by the means of reproduction, are much bigger — and hence more enjoyable — than we see in the funnies these days.) And while the artwork in *Palooka* is distinctive and well done, it isn't of the caliber of Alex Raymond or Hal Foster or Milton Caniff. It deserves better than it gets here, but it's the stories rather than the artwork that grip and hold the reader of this strip. And the stories in this volume are perfect for exhibiting the range of Fisher's skill in his vintage years.

There are, for example, plenty of fights. Fisher's sequences in the boxing ring are wonderful to witness. They are skillfully choreographed, every move carefully plotted. And every move that is depicted is given significance in the story, too, no wasted motions here. Every picture is accompanied by a "voice-over" narrative — the voice of a radio announcer describing to his audience what he sees. (Yes, in those golden days of yesteryear before television, we "watched" such athletic contests as boxing matches through the eyes of a radio announcer. So Fisher's device enhanced the illusion of reality in the strip.)

Here's the announcer: "Everyone is expecting Palooka to come out in the second [round] and kayo Red Rodney... there's the bell... Palooka jabbed but missed Rodney, who retaliated with a beautiful left hook to the side of Palooka's head... Palooka danced away... they're sparring now..." It's Joe's first fight against a left-hander, and he's fighting without Knobby in his corner (for reasons I'll explain anon). He's baffled by what his opponent does with his left hand. "Palooka can't seem to evade that terrible left of Rodney's," the announcer says, the picture showing Rodney landing a left hook that staggers the champ. And then — "Palooka has changed his stance... he's leading with his right, southpaw style. Will it work?" Next caption: "It didn't... Red feinted Joe and then whipped in a fierce left hook. Palooka has lost every round so far."

The fight goes on for two weeks. It was a typical Fisher performance; the fights were always deliciously long, every pugilistic nuance lovingly attended to. Finally, Joe figures out how to fight the southpaw; while in a clinch, he notices that Rodney's left isn't any good at short range. Joe moves in close: "Rodney tried to spar him off but Palooka crowded him there's a right to Rodney's breadbasket... and a left... wow! . it caught Red on the cheek... he's down... Rodney's on one knee... the count is six — but there's the bell — the round's over."

In Joe's corner, his trainer, Smokey, marvels: "Dawggone — what did yo' do?" "It's simple," Joe says. "I foun' out that crowdin' 'im dint give 'im a chance t' use a left — then I started usin' a straight right."

Joe talks like that. And his language reveals his humble nature. Fisher's homely locutions, the merciless contractions that infest his hero's utterances, suggest a soft-spoken manner of address. And that, in turn, reflects Joe's essential humility, his "just folks" origins, his redeeming lack of sophistication, his wholly unpretentious personality. There's nothing "elegunt" (as Fisher would have him say) about his speech. He says things like: "Kin ya 'magine?" "Honist." "I been insalted." "I wish I could go somewheres and jist be fergot." And when he's excited, "Tch, tch" — his most fervent expletive. And, always a model of good manners, "Than-kyou."

The 1938 sequence opens with the fight I've been describing, and it includes two other fistic encounters, but neither of these is in the boxing ring. The fight with Red Rodney is a charity fund-raiser which Joe undertakes in an effort to put behind him his latest unhappiness. He and Knobby have had a falling out. They went to Hollywood to make a motion picture (like many sports figures of the day). There Knobby falls in love with Joe's co-star, Joy Allure, who uses him to advance her career. To that purpose, she subsequently convinces Knobby that Joe is in love with her, and Knobby accuses Joe of stealing his girl. Heartbroken, he blurts out to Joe's fiancee, Ann Howe, that Joe is in love with another woman. Ann is devastated and won't speak to Joe. And Joe — betrayed by his manager (who is also his best friend) and deserted by his beloved — decides to leave it all behind him. First, he goes to Seattle for the previously arranged charity match with Rodney. (Joe wouldn't skip out on an obligation no

ABOVE: *Ham Fisher as he looked in 1950, from James Edgar's* Maclean's *profile*

matter how broken his heart.) After the fight, he and Smokey go abroad and join the French Foreign Legion. That's what every red-blooded hero did when he wanted to "forget" in those days. The ranks of the Foreign Legion were swollen with heroic characters seeking to forget unhappy love affairs.

But in Palooka's case, it's not as simple as that. The fight with Rodney has left the championship in doubt. After figuring out how to fight a southpaw, Joe quickly gets the upper hand in the fight, and Rodney is soon out on his feet. "Tch, tch," says Joe, "I wunt dare t'hit youse agin." He refuses to continue fighting, and in so doing, forfeits the championship: claiming that he disqualified himself, boxing officials declare it a technical knock-out and proclaim Rodney the victor and new heavyweight champion.

Meanwhile, Knobby has figured out that Joy Allure used him, and he's anxious to make amends with Joe. Listening in Los Angeles to the fight with Rodney, Knobby hears Joe disqualify himself and knows immediately the consequences. He works out a deal with the boxing commission to salvage Palooka's title: Joe must meet Rodney again, this time an official title bout, but the match must take place within 90 days. At this point, Knobby discovers that Joe has disappeared off the face of the planet.

The narrative shifts to a desert outpost in North Africa, where Joe encounters that cliché of Foreign Legion stories, the tyrannical sergeant whose disciplinary methods are more of a threat to the welfare of his men than any number of enemy rifles. Provoked by some petty cruelty, Joe challenges the sergeant to an off-duty fist fight and whips him; thereafter (as is usually the case with Fisher), they become fast friends.

Then a beautiful American tourist, Angela Billingsly, is abducted by a local sheik named Ibi-Ben-Abou — called "The Scourge of the Desert" — and Joe and the Legionnaires go to rescue her. One night while camped in the desert, Joe and Smokey go for a walk after dinner and get lost. After a week's worth of strips showing them getting thirstier and thirstier, they happen upon the encampment of the Scourge of the Desert, who promptly makes them his "prisoners." The Scourge turns out to be a roly-poly little fellow, a thoroughly pleasant host who, henpecked by a mountainous wife, amuses himself by baiting the Foreign Legion with pranks like kidnapping Angela Billingsly. He is, in short, one of Fisher's delightful comic turns. For his own amusement, Ibi-Ben-Abou arranges for Joe to fight his most fearsome warrior in order to obtain Angela's release. Joe wins (his third bout in five months), and he and Smokey take Angela and start out for the Legion outpost — little knowing that they have been declared deserters because of their long unexplained absence.

Meanwhile, stateside, Knobby has found out about Joe's enlistment — and that Joe must serve the five years he signed up for. That eliminates the possibility of defending his title against Red Rodney within the prescribed 90 days. Knobby learns, however, that the President of the U S could intercede for Joe and get him discharged. To prepare for the next sequence, Fisher contacted the White House to see if President Roosevelt would object to making an appearance in the strip. FDR had no objection; the strip was that popular.

So Knobby goes to Washington and pleads with FDR to arrange for Joe's discharge from the Foreign Legion. FDR does just that — and

more. When they discover that Joe is to be shot as a deserter, Roosevelt obtains not only the champion's release from the Legion but his full pardon.

But Fisher is able to torment his readers just a little longer: Knobby flies to North Africa to find Joe, but when he gets to the Legion outpost, he learns that everyone there believes Joe is dead. He deserted, they say, wandered off into the desert and, since he's not been seen or heard of since, he clearly expired on the hot sand. Fisher puts Knobby through about a week of bitter self-recrimination before bringing Joe and Smokey back on stage, safe and sound — and triumphant, Angela Billingsly contentedly in tow. Joe and Smokey and Knobby set off for the U.S by ocean liner, and Fisher takes up the last strand of the tangled skein he has woven: Joe is still bitter over Knobby's conduct in the Joy Allure affair, but when he learns that Knobby secured his freedom by pleading with President Roosevelt, he relents and forgives his manager.

The sequence consumes six months, and is one of the most celebrated of Fisher's stories. It is also the more complex of the two stories reprinted in the volume at hand. The other adventure takes place during World War II, and it takes us into the mountains of Montenegro, where Joe and Jerry Leemy join a guerrilla force led by sultry Nada Vidlitch, a beautiful and dedicated warrior. This is adventure of a different sort — behind-the-lines warfare, snipers, and sabotage. Joe is wounded and Nada nurses him back to health. She falls in love with him but denies it to herself.

On a convalescent stroll, Joe and Nada pause before the prospect of a mountain valley. "Ain't it beautiful," says Joe. "No," Nada says. For

ABOVE: *The climax of the long-awaited Joe Palooka Humphrey Pennyworth bout, in which Pennyworth forced against his will into a fight for the title with Palooka, manages to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, foiling his unscrupulous promoters' plans*

her, she explains, there is no longer any beauty. Her father, her mother, her brothers — all have been killed by the Fascists. For her — now — there is only the war. She has become, she says, a killer. And when Joe says, philosophically, that she should have enjoyed a home and romance, she says only that romance is for "soft girls — girls that can cry — not for me; I am hard." "No, Nada," says the champ, "you mustn't be. You are so swell. Some good man wants somebuddy like you, an' you'll rely on his strength an' love. There'll be peace again — someday." She turns her head away from him, and we see a tear run down her cheek.

Romance and danger, life and death, hope and love — Fisher's war. And in those days, Fisher reflected the beliefs of his audience.

Joe Palooka was, above all else, a sentimental strip. But it was unabashed, traditional American sentiment, born and bred in the custom and aspiration of the American spirit. Its raw sentimentality may undermine our interest these days; but during those war years — and for a period both before and after — the strip was in perfect step with the times.

Coulton Waugh, whose venerable 1947 work *The Comics* successfully shaped comics criticism for decades, says this about Fisher's strip

"The great quality that lifts the strip to the very top is simply the heart in it, the human love. All people... know that it is love that makes men rank above the brutes, but it is exceedingly difficult to write about or speak of this precious business without assuming the righteous attitude, the smallest hint of which sends the public scampering... In this respect, Ham Fisher resembles Milton Caniff; neither spoils his work with preachiness

"Things just happen in the life of Joe Palooka, he doesn't go out of his way to be good, it's just in him. He reacts with greatness because he can't help it... People simply [took] as an ideal

the big, graceful guy with thunder in his fist and with humility in his heart... He was one of them."

Year after year, Fisher told a gripping story And his stories gave his readers something to admire, to emulate. And so why don't we hear more about Ham Fisher and *Joe Palooka*? True, the strip's often cloying sentimentality makes it a little less than congenial reading these days But there's more to it than that. There's also the Conspiracy

It is a Conspiracy of silence, the silence of disdain. Ham Fisher couldn't draw, the Conspiracy proclaims. And Ham Fisher spread vicious lies about one of his most famous colleagues. So we never speak of Ham Fisher.

But the Conspiracy is not — and was not — a conscious undertaking. It was not the concoction of deliberation and design. It was an accident, an unforeseen constellation of circumstances, a happenstance of personality and event, which, invested with pride and ego and jealousy and aspiration, turned ugly. In short, it was a chemical conspiracy: the chemistry between Ham Fisher and his colleagues was wrong. To understand how it all went awry, we have to know something about Ham Fisher

ABOVE: *Joe and his fiancée Ann Howe visit with the strip's cloyingly cute ragamuffin Little Max*

A LIFE IN THE STRIP

Born in 1900 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Fisher served a brief stint in the Army during the closing months of World War I, then an apprenticeship as a staff cartoonist on *The Wilkes-Barre Herald* before settling into a job as a staff artist and sports cartoonist on *The Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader*. In about 1920, he interviewed a good-natured but unsophisticated prize fighter and was suddenly smitten by the idea for a comic strip about just such a person. Joe Palooka (whom Fisher first called Joe Dumbelletski) was conceived forthwith But he didn't see print until 1930.

The story of the launching of *Joe Palooka* is one of cartooning's legends. Fisher went to New York in 1920 to sell his strip, but no syndicate was interested For the rest of the decade, Fisher kept trying. While trying, he founded a newspaper in Wilkes-Barre (it failed shortly) and then returned to New York in 1927 to work in the advertising department of *The New York Daily News*. All the while, he kept peddling *Palooka*.

Finally, he ran into Charles McAdam, general manager of McNaught Syndicate, who promised to give *Palooka* a try the next year. Fisher insisted on going out to sell his strip himself. To prove his ability as a salesman, he undertook to sell one of McNaught's losers, *Dixie Dugan*, a strip about an erstwhile showgirl. It had been offered around before but only two papers had bought it. Paying his own expenses, Fisher went on the road and sold the strip to thirty-some papers in forty days. But when he wanted to repeat this impressive performance with his own strip, McAdam demurred. Fisher was so good at sales, McAdam said, he would be better for the syndicate as a salesman than as a cartoonist. But Fisher would not be denied. He waited until McAdam went on vacation, and then he took *Joe Palooka* on the road and sold it to twenty papers in three weeks. Fisher's strip was at last nationally syndicated. It was 1930; *Joe Palooka* had been gestating for ten years.

In *The Adventurous Decade*, Ron Goulart reveals something of the secret of Fisher's success as a salesman. He quotes from the autobiography of Emile Gauvreau, editor of *The New York Graphic* before becoming editor of William Randolph Hearst's *New York Mirror*: "I bought my last comic strip one New Year's Eve when Ham Fisher... befuddled me with a rare bottle of bourbon during a hilarious celebration. When I woke the next day, I found I was sponsor of *Joe Palooka*, an exemplary character who never drank or smoked and was good to his mother."

Joe first appeared on April 19, 1930; he walks into a Wilkes-Barre haberdashery run by Knobby Walsh, looking for work Knobby hires him, but one afternoon when Knobby's off playing cards with his cronies, Joe permits a bunch of local toughs to loot the store, believing they have charge accounts. Knobby is ruined, but he soon finds a way for Joe to help him

recoup. As it happens, the current heavyweight champion comes to town, and his manager puts out the word that he's looking for someone to fight in an exhibition contest for $200. Knobby talks Joe into doing it. Joe, who knows nothing about boxing, takes a drubbing for the first four rounds, but then, when Knobby tells him that his opponent was the leader of the footers, Joe is enraged, he charges out at the other fighter, yelling, "You un-honist crook!" He floors him with a single blow and finds himself the heavyweight champion. Fisher retold this story in 1943, and the sequence concludes the book at hand

Boxing was a popular sport in the 1930s and 1940s, and *Joe Palooka* was popular in consequence. Fisher found himself something of a celebrity Before long, he was hobnobbing with stellar figures in sports and in other arenas of public life. And these personages he often drew into the strip in cameo appearances ringside during one of Joe's fights — fighters Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney; politicos "Big Jim" Farley and New York's one-time "midnight mayor" of the jazz age, Jimmy Waler; movie stars like Clark Gable, Bing Crosby, and Claudette Colbert.

Capitalizing on the public's interest in boxing, Fisher imbued his stories with realistic touches. He spent as much energy in the strip building up to a big fight as real-life promoters did for real-life contests. And Joe's training camp reeked of authenticity. But all the realism created a problem. Fisher's cartooning ability was of the big-foot comic school. Clark's book includes a couple of panels from the earliest *Palooka* strips; Fisher's skill was on a par with many of his contemporaries — Sidney Smith, for instance; even some of the early work of Harold Gray and Chester Gould. But that kind of primitive realism couldn't create the aura Fisher was now seeking. So Fisher did what many cartoonists did then (and still do): he hired an artist more talented than he to do the drawing.

The first of these was another Wilkes-Barre refugee, Phil Boyle. Because so much of the run of the strip was ghosted by others, rumors persist in the cartooning community — particularly, as Goulart reports, among older cartoonists — that Fisher never drew the strip. Even the sample strips that launched the feature, according to this tradition, were drawn by a ghost (a high school student, so the story goes). But this, as I hope to demonstrate herein, is but part of the Conspiracy. It is true, however — without cavil or question — that most of the years of *Joe Palooka* were drawn by others.

Moe Leff was the ghost who haunted the feature longest. Goulart says (in the essay at the beginning of Clark's book) that Fisher hired Leff away from Al Capp in the mid-'30s, speculating that this maneuver gave Capp "yet another reason to loathe Fisher." Leff was the principal graphic force in *Joe Palooka* for about twenty years. But, according to the Fisher legend, Fisher always drew the faces of Joe and Knobby; Leff left blank ovals on the illustration board, and Fisher deftly filled them in. Considering that the faces of Joe and Knobby were rendered very simply compared to the visages of other characters in the strip, this contention is probably true.

Fisher's connection with Capp began in 1933. That year, Fisher hired Capp, who, according to the legend both of them fostered for a while, was walking disconsolately along a New York street near Central Park South. Capp had worked briefly for the Associated press Feature Service in 1932 (doing *Colonel Gilfeather*, AP's imitation of Gene Ahern's blowhard anti-hero, Major Hoople) before returning, after a few months, to Boston and his new bride, Catherine. In 1933, he came back to the Big Apple for yet another try at the brass ring. He had six bucks and no luck. Fisher, passing by in a chauffeur-driven limousine, spied a bundle of illustration boards under Capp's arm, guessed he was an out-of-work artist, and commissioned him on the spot to finish a Sunday page. And when Capp proved he could do satisfactory work, Fisher hired him as his assistant.

According to the Capp clan's version of subsequent events, Fisher then went off to London on a trip with Flagg, leaving Capp behind to both write and draw the strip. Casting about for a story, Capp remembered some hillbillies he'd seen on a trip through the South in his youth; he took Joe Palooka into the hills and staged a match between the champ and the meanest of the hillbillies, an uncouth character named Big Leviticus. This episode became the bone of contention between Fisher and Capp, giving rise eventually to the most shameful events in the profession's short history.

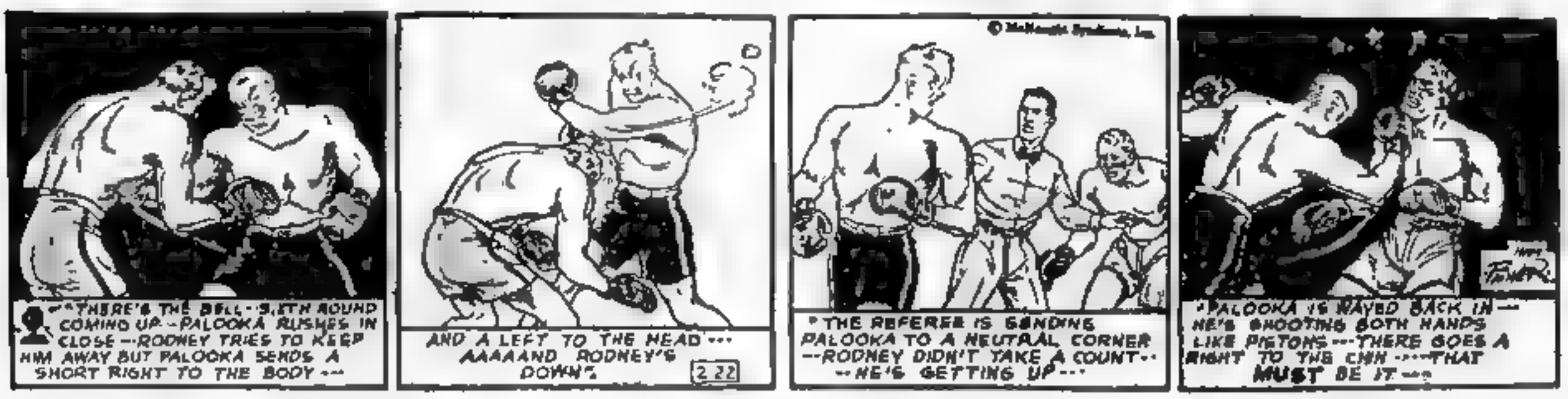
In the Fisher version of events, Fisher had the idea for Big Leviticus and wrote the story, leaving the illustration of it to Capp. In other words, he followed his usual practice in producing the strip.

The Big Leviticus story ran in November 1933. Capp quit working for Fisher about that time. *Li'l Abner* started the next summer on August 13. Judging from the sequence of events, Fisher assumed that Capp had found his inspiration for a comic strip about hillbillies in the Big Leviticus story

Catherine Capp, writing an introduction to Volume One of the Kitchen Sink *Li'l Abner* reprint series, remembers going with her husband to a vaudeville show in which a hillbilly act greatly amused them both. It was this incident, she says, that sparked Capp's creation of his famous hillbilly strip. Fisher would later claim that he created the first hillbillies on the funnies page, strenuously suggesting that his one-time assistant stole the idea from him Capp would treat Fisher's claim with disdain (which only enraged Fisher).

We'll probably never know the truth of the matter with certainty But it is more than probable that every one of the participants in the dispute has a piece of the truth on his side. Take the question of the "creation" of a comic strip character In his mind, Fisher could legitimately claim to have created Big Leviticus and his outrageous family even if all he actually did was to give Capp instructions to do a sequence about Joe Palooka fighting a roughneck hillbilly The concept, as they might say these days in Hollywood, was Fisher's. The execution might have been left entirely to Capp. And if Capp fleshed out the idea — gave personality to big Leviticus and his entourage — he could legitimately claim to have "created" the character, too.

But whether Capp was inspired by the vaudeville act, by his own experiences on a trip into the South years before, or by Fisher's Big Leviticus, is probably beside the point. As Dave Schreiner points out in the Kitchen Sink book, hillbillies were "in the air" in those days. Hillbillies were on stage and in songs. And in books and movies. Capp could have caught the contagion from Erskine Caldwell's novel *Tobacco*



ABOVE: *Fisher uses a radio announcer voice-over to call out Joe's fight with crafty lefty Red Rodney*

Road, which was published in 1932, or Caldwell's *God's Little Acre,* published in 1933. In 1934, Billy DeBeck, responding undoubtedly to the currents of interest he detected in popular culture at the time, took Barney Google into the hills where he met Snuffy Smith, who eventually took the strip away from Google. Fisher never accused DeBeck of stealing hillbillies from him. But DeBeck had never been Fisher's assistant. And DeBeck had never quit Fisher either.

But all that, as I said, is beside the point. Whatever the actual truth of the matter, Fisher was aggrieved. And his grievance would fester for years until it erupted in the profession's most notorious scandal, as we shall see.

By the end of the '30s, Fisher's strip was secure among the top five strips in the country. Then he did an unprecedented thing. He enlisted his hero and his strip in the cause of democracy on the eve of the Second World War. It was not only unprecedented, in many corners of the country, it was unpopular. Isolationists, wary of European intrigues because of the unsatisfactory resolution of World War I, vociferously resisted any inclination FDR might occasionally voice about support for Britain, which, by the summer of 1940, was the only European nation not under the heel of Hitler's war machine. By way of preparing for emergencies, however, FDR had succeeded in launching universal military conscription late in the summer of 1940. Fisher helped FDR put over the idea of the draft by having Joe Palooka enlist. Joe went in as a private even though he was offered a commission. (Another heavyweight champ, Joe Louis, would soon do exactly the same, and by so doing he increased the respect and regard in which he was held by his fellow Americans.)

Fisher carefully researched Army camp life and depicted it with meticulous attention to detail. Joe became the voice of patriotism — not strident and shrill or loud and bombastic, but soft-spoken and sure, confident. Fisher also courageously advocated more than ordinary patriotism. He was an outspoken proponent of racial tolerance as well, in an age when even the military services were segregated. Joe's enlistment and his subsequent conduct helped convince young Americans to put on uniforms in the year before the U.S. was officially in the War. FDR was grateful and said so. And so Ham Fisher had become the Friend of Presidents.

Joe had many combat adventures throughout the War. The strip was a decided morale-booster among those in uniform. Fisher had given his strip a social purpose beyond entertainment, but he had also enhanced its already considerable popularity.

During the War, many comic strip heroes went into military service to help build morale. And cartoonists did their bit, too. In the New York vicinity, cartoonists frequently banded together to entertain recuperating soldiers in military hospitals. After the War, the cartoonists decided to perpetuate the fellowship they had all enjoyed while doing chalktalks for the troops: they formed the National Cartoonists Society. The key players were Ernie Bushmiller, C.D. Russell, Gus Edson, Otto Soglow, Milton Caniff, Russell Patterson, and Rube Goldberg. Especially Goldberg; at the time, he was the Grand Old Man of cartooning. He had stature, the kind that inspired reverence, not jealousy. Patterson knew no organization of cartoonists could survive without Goldberg's active participation, and he convinced Goldberg to espouse the effort. Goldberg, who hated the formalities and rituals of organizational enterprises, nonetheless became the first president of the Society.

Fisher was among the first to join the group. And his behavior among his peers was telling. The NCS met most often at the clubhouse of the Society of Illustrators on East 63rd Street. The meetings tended to be short; the purposes of the group were, at the time, chiefly social, and those purposes were achieved in the clubhouse bar after the official meetings were adjourned. In the barroom, Fisher kept himself nearly as busy as the bartender. All evening, he ran back and forth between the bar and the various tables at which cartoonists sat in groups, talking and laughing. Fisher took their drink orders and brought them to the tables. Why would Fisher, one of the world's most successful cartoonists, spend his evenings among his peers running drinks to them?

Fisher certainly regarded himself as a celebrity. His strip was one of the most widely circulated strips in the world. He referred to *Joe Palooka* as "the world's greatest comic strip." Yet despite all this — despite his undeniable success and fame — Ham Fisher was, I believe, essentially an insecure individual.

His actions speak volumes. He sought the company of famous people. He went to great lengths to associate himself with them. He courted celebrities by depicting them in the strip. He recognized consciously that he, too, was a famous person. But unconsciously, he wasn't sure. He had to be convinced. To bolster his own opinion of himself he needed the reassurance he could feel if he were in the company of the people *he* regarded as famous. If he associated with famous people, surely he too was famous. His vanity — not to mention the very vitality of his self-esteem — was fed by his proximity to the famous. And Fisher was unquestionably vain. He tooted his own horn. He carried around lists of all the newspapers that subscribed to the strip and would proudly produce them at the slightest provocation.

All cartoonists, like entertainers everywhere, are egotists. They have good opinions of themselves. But most of them, laboring quietly at drawing boards in spare bedrooms around the country, are fairly modest and unassuming in their outward behavior. For some, such demeanor is a pose. But few major figures in cartooning ever make an exhibition of themselves like Ham Fisher did — proclaiming his own greatness to his peers, who all knew, as no

ABOVE: *Panels from one of Al Capp's* Li'l Abner *strips that Fisher claimed was pornographic.*
CENTER: *Capp's heroically stupid Abner Yokum.*

other assembly of persons could, just how great he was. They didn't need Fisher to tell them about Fisher. They knew and appreciated his achievement. But they were turned off by his loud and boorish displays of self-adulation And they saw through his fawning servitude in the bar of the Illustrators clubhouse; they knew he was courting the favor of those whom he regarded as great. The rest of the company — the cartoonists whom Fisher did not see as very famous — Fisher ignored. And those cartoonists resented it. Resenting it, they were receptive to information that revealed Fisher as they saw him. Fisher's opinion of Rube Goldberg, for instance At one of the early meetings of the Society, Fisher button-holed Goldberg, telling him how much he, Fisher, admired his work, how great Goldberg was, and so on. Later, Fisher confided to another cartoonist that it was "too bad" about Goldberg. The man was a has-been, he opined, over the hill. Goldberg heard about this, and it galled him. And it irked others who learned of it The incident confirmed to them their low opinion of Fisher. Fisher, they could see, was a self-serving blowhard, willing to advance himself at everyone else's expense if need be. The situation was ripe for an incident to consolidate the feeling against Fisher. And Fisher, poor soul, — vain, attention-starved, insecure, and envious Fisher — created the incident.

On the Sunday *Joe Palooka* page for October 31, 1948, Ham Fisher scratched an itch. He had watched Capp's climb to fame enviously. Among his colleagues in NCS, Fisher made no secret of his conviction that Capp had stolen from him the idea of hillbilly characters while assisting in *Palooka* in 1933. Fisher decided to go public with his gripe. In the opening panel of his Sunday page, he lettered his message for the world to see: "First hillbillies ever to appear in a comic strip were Big Leviticus and his family [in *Joe Palooka*]. Any resemblance to our original hillbillies is certainly NOT coincidental."

Fisher had alluded to this proposition in print before. When he was interviewed by Martin Sheridan for *Comics and Their Creators* (published in 1944), Fisher said that other comic strips had adopted the prize fighter theme since he introduced it, and "many comics are based on hillbillies since I first used Big Leviticus in my strip." But making the claim in the comic strip itself — where all readers of the funnies could see it — was a somewhat bolder maneuver than asserting the same thing between the covers of a book that would be read only by bookish people. Besides, the 1948 statement is much more aggressive in alleging plagiarism.

What prompted the October 1948 assault? Probably envy, simple if not pure. The previous spring, Capp had won the Billy DeBeck Award, the NCS trophy for Best Cartoonist of the Year (now called the Reuben) It was only the second year of the Award, and it carried great status. (Milton Caniff had won the first year.) A man of Fisher's insecurity undoubtedly felt he would never win the DeBeck Award; despite *Joe Palooka*'s first-place finish in most readership popularity polls. (In fact, Fisher was never to be so honored by his peers.) With that worry gnawing at him, it must have rankled that his former assistant should win it

Until this time, Capp had behaved towards Fisher in the usual gentlemanly manner adopted by those of the profession. In public, he had only nice things to say about Fisher. In Sheridan's book, for instance, Capp recounted the story of Fisher's rescuing him from his poverty-stricken safari through the streets of New York. "I worked with Fisher for several months," Capp said, "and owe most of my success to him for I learned many tricks of the trade while working alongside him." Even then, Capp may not have believed what he said, but he knew that's what ought to be said under the circumstances, so he played the game. Fisher, as we've noted, couldn't play that game. He was too insecure to allow the spotlight on him to waver in its focus.

Capp decided to twit Fisher in response to the October attack. Learning that Fisher would undergo plastic surgery to have his nose remodeled, Capp celebrated the event by introducing into his strip a horse named Ham's Nose-bob. Later, as their feud developed, Capp produced a sequence in which Li'l Abner draws a successful comic strip for a cheap scoundrel named Happy Vermin, who keeps Li'l Abner locked in a closet while taking all the credit for the strip's success himself

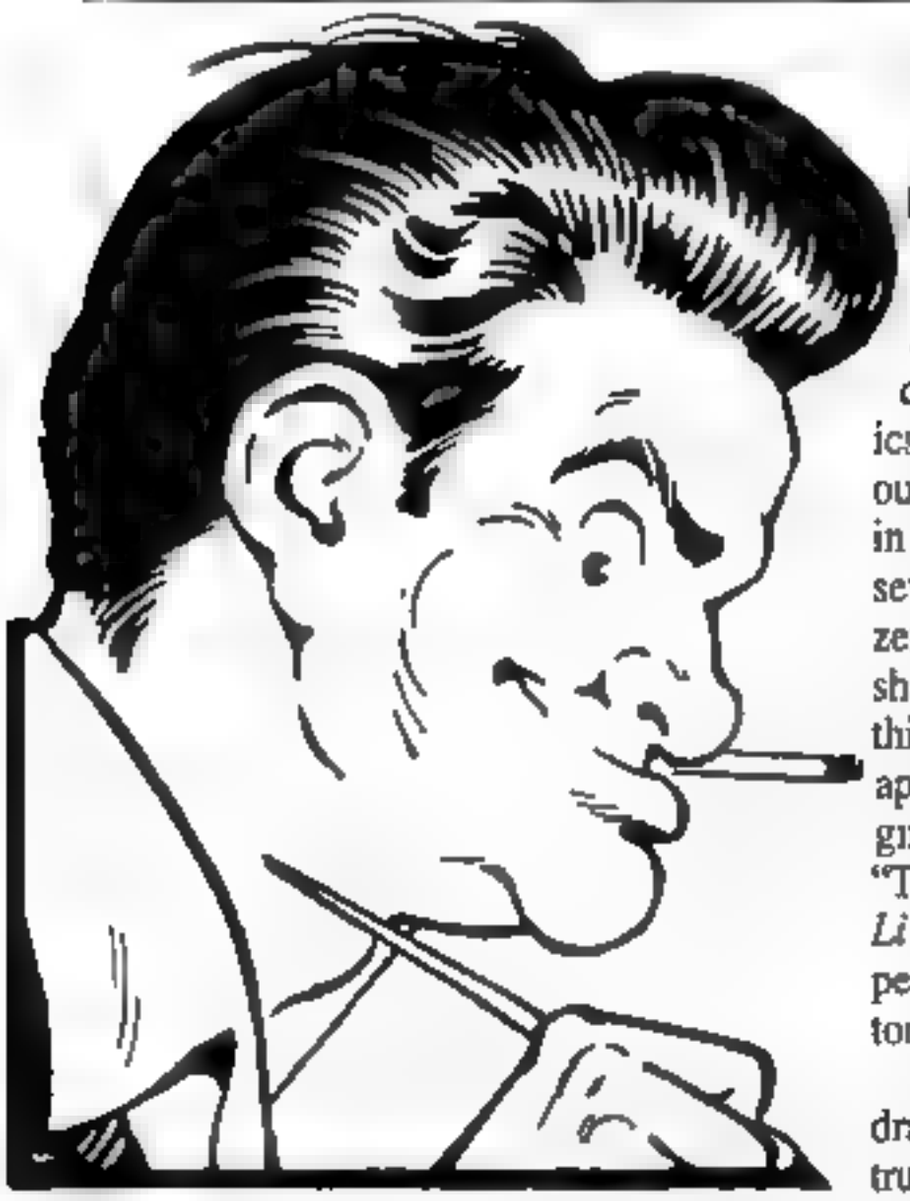
Fisher was less forthright in retaliating to Capp's frontal assaults. His style was to sneak around behind Capp's back, spreading gossip and the Fisher gospel (that he, Fisher, had invented comic strip hillbillies) in whatever company he found himself His quarrel with his one-time assistant become an obsession, and that, coupled to his own overweening self-importance, made Fisher a colossal boor It also made him the perfect target for any number of practical jokes staged by other cartoonists, most of whom by this time had little regard for him. Once when Fisher threatened to derail a charity luncheon at "21" from its purpose by usurping the agenda to attack Capp, one of the group slipped out and recruited a comely young woman to deliver Fisher's comeuppance. Unannounced, she walked into the third floor private room and made straight for Fisher. She was beautiful enough to stop conversation: everyone watched her progress in silence. Giving Fisher a brilliant smile, she handed him a piece of blank paper and asked for his autograph. Dazzled by her beauty and flattered by the obvious adoration of such a gorgeous creature and gratified by thoughts of the envy her admiration must inspire in those around him, Fisher drew the face of his famous character and singed it "with all good wishes from Joe Palooka and Ham Fisher " The girl took the paper and stared at it in frowning perplexity. Then, tearing the paper twice and dropping the pieces on the floor, she exclaimed, "You're not Al Capp? I wanted Al Capp's autograph!" She turned on her heels and strode away. The room exploded. Fisher turned white in rage and embarrassment. No man can take a joke about his obsession.

Knowing Fisher employed assistants to draw *Joe Palooka*, cartoonists circulated the rumor that Fisher couldn't draw at all. (Ironically, Capp's practice in producing *Li'l Abner* was precisely the same as Fisher's with *Palooka* Capp wrote the strip and drew the faces of his principals, but the rest of the drawing was left to assistants. But no one spread the rumor that Capp couldn't draw.)

In 1950, events reached fever pitch. Al Capp was, as usual, manufacturing his own publicity He was adept at staging publicity stunts in his strip and elsewhere, stunts that kept his name before the public. One of those gimmicks he launched in 1946 — a contest among readers to draw a convincing picture of the ugliest woman in the world, Leena the Hyena. These antics usually resulted in Capp's getting coverage in such magazines as *Time* and *Newsweek*. That year, Capp decided to write an article himself It was a piece for *Atlantic Monthly*, and it saw print in the April issue. Purporting to explain the inspiration for the more villainous characters in *Li'l Abner* — those "unsanitary, uncouth, unregenerate, unspeakable apes, fiends, and human horrors whose lechery, treachery, and skullduggery make the golden goodness of the Yokums shine even more brightly by contrast" — the article was the latest salvo in the Fisher-Capp feud. Capp called it "I Remember Monster," and although he never mentioned Ham Fisher by name, it was clear to anyone familiar with his well-publicized professional history that the monster was Fisher, his one-time employer With his customary high-flying hyperbole, Capp claimed he didn't have to invent any of those unsavory varmints that so invigorated his strip:

> *The truth is I don't think 'em up. I was lucky enough to know them —all of them— and what*

ABOVE: *As an example of the type of blatant image doctoring Fisher employed to make* Li'l Abner *appear to be obscene, R.C. Harvey here has taken one of Capp's panels and, with a few pen strokes rendered an innocuous nose into a raging phallus!*



was even luckier, all in the person of one man. One veritable gold mine of human swinishness. It was my privilege, as a boy, to be associated with a certain treasure-trove of lousiness, who, in the normal course of each day of his life, managed to be, in dazzling succession, every conceivable kind of heel. It was an advantage few young cartoonists have enjoyed — or could survive. I owe all my success to him. From my study of this one li'l man, I have been able to create an entire gallery of horrors. For instance, when I must create a character who is the ultimate in cheapness, I don't, like less fortunate cartoonists, have to rack my brain wondering what real bottom-of-the-barrel cheapness is like. I saw the classic of 'em all. Better than that, I was the victim of it.

Capp went on for the rest of his four-page essay to retell extremely unflattering anecdotes about the man he referred to only as his "Benefactor."

Goaded on, doubtless, by such humiliations, and by his continued failure to get anyone to take him seriously on either hillbillies or Capp, Fisher resorted to a peculiarly unsavory way of striking back at his nemesis. He had certain panels of *Li'l Abner* enlarged and reprinted, then, circling selected graphic details in red, he distributed them to the editors of newspapers carrying the strip. Alleging that the highlighted details were subliminal pornography designed to undermine the youth of the nation, he urged editors to drop Capp's strip.

Capp's article in the *Atlantic Monthly* and Fisher's smear campaign brought matters to a head. The feud had become too public. It was unseemly and disgraceful that the creators of two of the top five comic strips in the country should be so viciously tearing away at each other. Their respective syndicates, fearing they'd lose papers as a result of the fight, called for a truce, and a peace treaty was negotiated by proxies in August 1950. Unhappily, the story did not end then. Later that year, blow-ups of panels from *Li'l Abner* comic books were submitted anonymously to the New York State Joint Legislative Committee for the Study of the Publication of Comics, the body charged with determining whether or not comics should be censored. The drawings had obviously been tampered with — the pornography in *Li'l Abner* was no longer subliminal. In several panels, the prominent nose of one citizen of Dogpatch had been extended into the shape of a penis. In one panel, Daisy Mae and this same Dogpatcher are shown in a position approximating copulation. Written in the margin of this drawing was this proclamation. "This insane, perverted pornography is from *Li'l Abner*, yes!!! This is what Al Capp has perpetrated for 15 years on unsuspecting editors of American newspapers!!!"

The accusation was absurd. The doctored drawings were so blatantly pornographic as to trumpet their obscenity. None of them could have slipped by an editor into print.

When Milton Caniff, serving then on the NCS Ethics Committee, saw the drawings later in a report prepared by the Joint Committee, he wrote to Capp to express his utter astonishment: "There has been such obvious distortion, contraction and withdrawing from context that someone (clearly not connected with the Committee) has altered the material in an effort to cause mischief or worse." Alex Raymond, who was then President of the Cartoonists Society, had been drawn into the affair, and he agreed with Caniff and wrote to Capp in even more definite terms:

> *I am convinced, after seeing the photostats reproduced in the report of the Joint Committee... compared with the original drawings of* Li'l Abner *from which the photostats were made, that someone distorted, cropped, faked, wrongfully emphasized, and twisted your material during the process of reproduction to make it appear pornography.*

Given the temper of the times (the McCarthy era had just dawned), the growing criticism of the comics (as being a cause of the post-war wave of juvenile delinquency that was sweeping the country), and the task assigned to the Joint Committee on Comics (to decide whether to censor comics), the situation was suddenly grave in the extreme. It was no longer a simple question of someone's having attacked Al Capp — this act of intemperate zealotry could result in the restriction of creative freedom for an entire profession.

Raymond summoned Fisher to appear before the Board of Governors of NCS for questioning. Fisher came and vehemently denied having anything to do with the pornographic *Li'l Abner* panels. Fortunately, the matter went no further at the time. The forgeries were so obvious that even state legislators, presumably all laymen wholly unschooled in the finer points of art criticism, could tell the drawings had been faked. But the potential for tragedy lingered on, even though Fisher and Capp now curbed their animosities.

Then, in the fall of 1954, the affair erupted anew. A Boston communications company in which Capp had a small interest applied to the Federal Communications Commission for a license to operate a television station. When the FCC held a hearing on the application, the 1951 report of the New York State legislative committee studying the comics was anonymously introduced. The report, which contained the forged pornographic drawings from *Li'l Abner*, was clearly intended to discredit the applicant's fitness to operate a TV station. Capp denied that he had drawn the offending pictures and produced the letter from Alex Raymond who was unequivocal in his support of Capp's position, but Capp was nonetheless forced to withdraw his interest in the Massachusetts Bay Telecasters, Inc., in order to expedite the proceedings and to ensure the firm's success in obtaining a license. He then appealed to the Cartoonists Society to do something about Fisher.

The matter was referred to the Ethics Committee, then chaired by Caniff, and, in due course, the Committee voted to call Fisher to account for his conduct. Although there was no hard evidence to link Fisher to the forgeries, the cartoonists decided after examining the drawings that the tampering had probably been done in what they determined to be Fisher's style (a complicated feat of mental gymnastics for people who often asserted that Fisher could not draw at all). This and all the other surrounding circumstances led to a conclusion that Fisher had in fact done the dirty deed — the long-running feud, Fisher's almost irrational animosity towards Capp, the episode of the annotated *Li'l Abner* strips that were circulated to editors a few years before, Fisher's boorish preoccupation with the alleged pornography in Capp's work. (Fisher later admitted to confidants that he'd done it.)

On January 24, 1955, Fisher was summoned to a special meeting of the Society's Board of Governors to hear the charges presented by the Ethics Committee. In addition to Caniff, the company included Rube Goldberg, Mort Walker, and NCS President Walt Kelly. The Committee charged Fisher with doctoring the drawings and circulating the forgeries to discredit Capp — acts which had the effect of endangering the creative well-being of every other cartoonist. In submitting the drawings to the New York State joint Legislative Committee on the Comics, Fisher had subjected the profession undeservedly to scrutiny by a body that was actively considering measures that would restrict every cartoonist's freedom to express himself in his work. Fisher's conduct, the Committee concluded, was "in violation of the entire spirit of the Society and the purposes for which is was established," reflected "discredit upon the Society and the entire profession of cartooning," and was "unbecoming a member of the Society."

Fisher, who had come with his lawyer, took the advice of his counsel: he said absolutely nothing as the charges were presented. Walt

ABOVE: *Al Capp, in a self-portrait from* Li'l Abner *circa 1949*

Kelly, his unlit cigar stub firmly wedged into the corner of his mouth, kept pressuring him for answers — quietly, insistently — but Fisher said nothing. Finally, Fisher's lawyer said that they'd have to see the charges in writing before attempting to answer them. He and Fisher left, and the meeting broke up.

A letter setting forth the charges was composed forthwith. And in its conclusion, Fisher was ordered to appear to defend himself on February 1. On February 1, Fisher asked for a postponement, saying he was ill. But when he failed to appear at the rescheduled meeting, the Society acted on the basis of the Ethics Committee's findings. Kelly wrote Fisher with the news:

> *We have the unhappy duty to inform you that after due deliberation, the Board of Governors of the National Cartoonists Society has unanimously ruled that you are suspended from membership for conduct unbecoming a member. This suspension will remain in effect until such time as you appear to offer evidence which may change our minds. You have been given three opportunities and many hours of hearings to justify yourself. We are sorry that you have failed to do so.*
>
> *Regretfully,*
> *The Board of Governors*

Unfortunately, the news of Fisher's suspension was leaked (probably by Capp) to *Editor & Publisher*, which announced it in its February 26 issue. Fisher promptly fired off a letter in his own defense. He protested the "unseemly haste" of the Society's action, saying that he was not given a chance to defend himself. "The Board of Governors ignored my request for a postponement of its hearing. At the time, I was seriously ill, under doctors' care." He fulminated against Capp, defending the authenticity of the drawings that established Capp as a pornographer, and charging that his suspension was "part of a scheme to whitewash Al Capp in behalf of his TV venture." He claimed that it was "unmistakable" that the accusations against him were "completely fraudulent," and he said that he had "new material which has just become available" that would vindicate him. He was confident, he concluded, that in the light of this new evidence, the Society would "reconsider its hasty and intemperate action." Considering that feeling among the cartoonists ran relentlessly against Fisher, the Society had been remarkably restrained in merely suspending him — and in giving him an indefinite period in which to respond and reclaim his standing in the membership. But Fisher never brought to light the new evidence he claimed to have. And at the end of the year, he was dead. By his own hand.

Anyone with any psychological acumen might have seen it coming. In spite of his brave words, Fisher was devastated by the suspension. He had been publicly humiliated. He could no longer go about in society among the celebrities whose company was so vital to his sense of well-being. He disappeared from New York's café society. He stayed to himself. He brooded, martyr-like. Then, on the evening of December 27, 1955, Fisher was found dead on the couch in the studio of his assistant, Moe Leff. Fisher had been using the studio while Leff was out of town. In two notes found near the body, Fisher had written that he was despondent about his health (he had diabetes and his eyesight was beginning to fail) and that he intended to take an overdose of some pills he had been using. "God will forgive me," he wrote, "for I have provided for my family."

As soon as he heard the news of Fisher's suicide, Caniff thought of Capp. "I called his house in Boston," he told me. "His kids were still at home then, and his daughter answered the phone. Al was out. And she said, 'Any message?' So I said, 'Ham Fisher is dead.' And she said, 'Who did it?' Didn't ask how he died — she said, 'Who did it?' He was that cordially disliked."

Caniff always felt that Fisher's death was related to his suspension from NCS. Pointing out that Fisher's dues to the Society were paid through the end of the year, Caniff noted that Fisher was technically still a member when he died. "He committed suicide on the 27th so he wouldn't be thrown out," Caniff said. "He died a member."

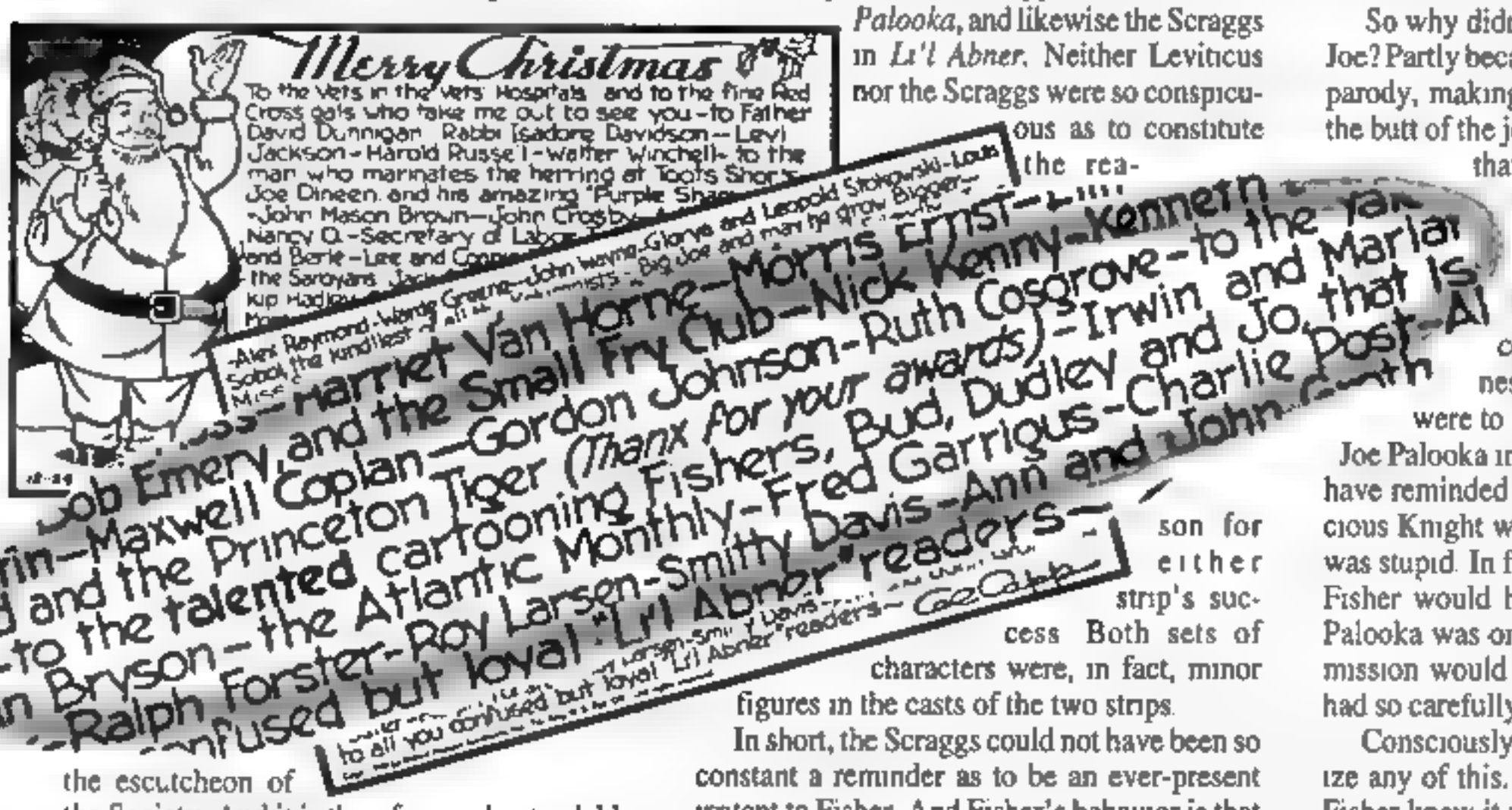
A NEW LOOK BACK

The Conspiracy resulted in tragedy. But the Conspiracy didn't end with Fisher's death. It is still bruited about that Fisher couldn't draw, for instance. And I've seen evidence to the contrary — including photographs of him doing chalktalks at which it would be impossible to fake drawing ability. But even if my bald-faced assertion is suspect — since I didn't actually see Fisher draw the pictures attributed to him — the logic of the contention that he couldn't draw is internally flawed. And the flaws reveal the falsity of the allegation. If he couldn't draw, how could his colleagues determine he had doctored the panels from *Li'l Abner*? And if he couldn't draw, the anecdote about the beautiful blonde wanting his autograph and being disappointed when she realized he wasn't Al Capp is a fabrication — a key aspect of the story is Fisher drawing a picture of Joe Palooka right there, on the spot. But the Conspiracy, as I said, was not — and is not — a conscious plot. No one decided to deny Ham Fisher a place in the history of cartooning. But the tragic end of the Fisher-Capp feud could well promote feelings of shame and guilt, feelings that were suppressed by keeping silent.

Not realizing until after his death how vulnerable Fisher was, some may have regretted treating him the way they did. Fisher was not a

ABOVE: *More evidence for Fisher's hysterical nose-as-penis theory of* Li'l Abner*'s obscenity.*

likable person, and his behavior towards Capp was unconscionable. He surely deserved the official censure he received at the hands of his colleagues. But still, did it have to end the way it did? Perhaps — as a few thoughtful souls may have conjectured to themselves — we could have behaved differently towards him all along, and maybe then the tragedy would have been averted. A fanciful speculation, I admit. Fancy aside, Fisher's death was something of a blot on



the escutcheon of the Society. And it is therefore understandable if people fell into the habit of not mentioning it. And by avoiding the subject of Fisher's death, the subject of his attainments is likewise avoided. In such a fashion a conspiracy of silence might be initiated — an inadvertent conspiracy, but a conspiracy nonetheless.

While I'm at it, let me toy with one more fanciful speculation. Fisher's behavior strikes me as more than a little extreme. Capp's appropriation of hillbilly characters for a comic strip doesn't seem to me to be sufficient provocation for Fisher's subsequent actions — the smear campaign, the doctored drawings. Psychologically speaking, when someone's behavior is excessive for the provocation, it suggests that the supposed motivation is not, in fact, the real reason for the reaction we see. And when this happens, it's because the real reason must not be acknowledged. It must remain a secret. And that, I think, is exactly what lies beneath the famous feud.

Fisher accused Capp of stealing his hillbilly idea, but there is virtually no substantial similarity between the Yokums and the family of Big Leviticus. Both families are hillbillies, and both are, by sophisticated big city standards, stupid, but there the resemblance ends. The Yokums are absolutely good; Big Leviticus is mean. Fisher could scarcely claim Li'l Abner is Big Leviticus.

ABOVE: *Capp got in a subtle dig at Fisher in his 1949 Christmas strip by purposefully omitting Ham from the list of "*talented *cartooning Fishers."*

There's little question that Big Leviticus and his family are reincarnated in *Li'l Abner* as the infamously evil Scragg family. But with the Scraggs, Capp exceeded anything Fisher could have imagined. The Scraggs are absolutely amoral monsters, killing and maiming their way to their objectives, whatever they may be. Big Leviticus was mean, an all-purpose bully, but he wasn't monstrous. Besides, Big Leviticus made only occasional appearances in *Joe Palooka*, and likewise the Scraggs in *Li'l Abner*. Neither Leviticus nor the Scraggs were so conspicuous as to constitute the reason for either strip's success. Both sets of characters were, in fact, minor figures in the casts of the two strips.

In short, the Scraggs could not have been so constant a reminder as to be an ever-present irritant to Fisher. And Fisher's behavior is that of a man constantly and continually plagued with a problem. The explanation for all this, it seems to me, is this: Fisher didn't believe Capp stole hillbillies from him; he believed Capp stole Joe Palooka.

Think about it. Both heroes are big strong hulks and a little slow-witted. I don't mean that Joe Palooka was ever as stupid as Li'l Abner, but the early Joe was so naive, so innocent of the world, that he seemed stupid. Like Li'l Abner, Joe came from a relatively small town environment in rural America. As in Capp's strip, some of Joe's earliest predicaments were caused by his innocent inability to understand the more sophisticated world in which he found himself. (The 1943 sequence reenacting Joe's first fight reprinted in Clark's volume is a good example of exactly this aspect of Palooka's character.) Joe usually wins in these situations: his essential goodness triumphs, an affirmation of virtue.

In Li'l Abner, we have pure stupidity firmly ensconced in place of naive innocence. But the flywheel of the strip's dynamic is the same: stupidity and innocence are interchangeable as plot devices. For all his stupidity, Li'l Abner is as fundamentally good as Joe Palooka. But the good characters in *Li'l Abner* do not so much win as they simply survive. They are resilient rather than victorious. Mammy Yokum is the exception; when she becomes engaged, she wins. But the other Yokums are perpetual victims. They are good people, but they don't survive by being virtuous, as Joe Palooka does. They survive because the forces opposing them destroy themselves with conflicting venal motives.

The lesson of Fisher's strip is that virtue will prevail. The lesson of Capp's strip is that evil will prevail but that goodness will somehow survive. His strip was the cynical response to Fisher's strip. *Li'l Abner* could almost be seen as a lampoon of *Joe Palooka*. No wonder Fisher was so continually enraged by Capp.

So why didn't Fisher claim that Capp stole Joe? Partly because that claim would unveil the parody, making Fisher's achievement overtly the butt of the joke. But there is more to it than that. Eventually, Joe Palooka got smarter. As he became an inspirational figure, he became more sophisticated. He lost his innocence. And in place of innocence, Fisher substituted goodness, pure and simple. If Fisher were to have claimed that Capp copied Joe Palooka in creating Li'l Abner, he would have reminded everyone that his Kindly Gracious Knight was once as naive as Li'l Abner was stupid. In fact, to all intents and purposes, Fisher would have been confessing that Joe Palooka was once a stupid hick. And that admission would have sullied the image Fisher had so carefully constructed for his champion.

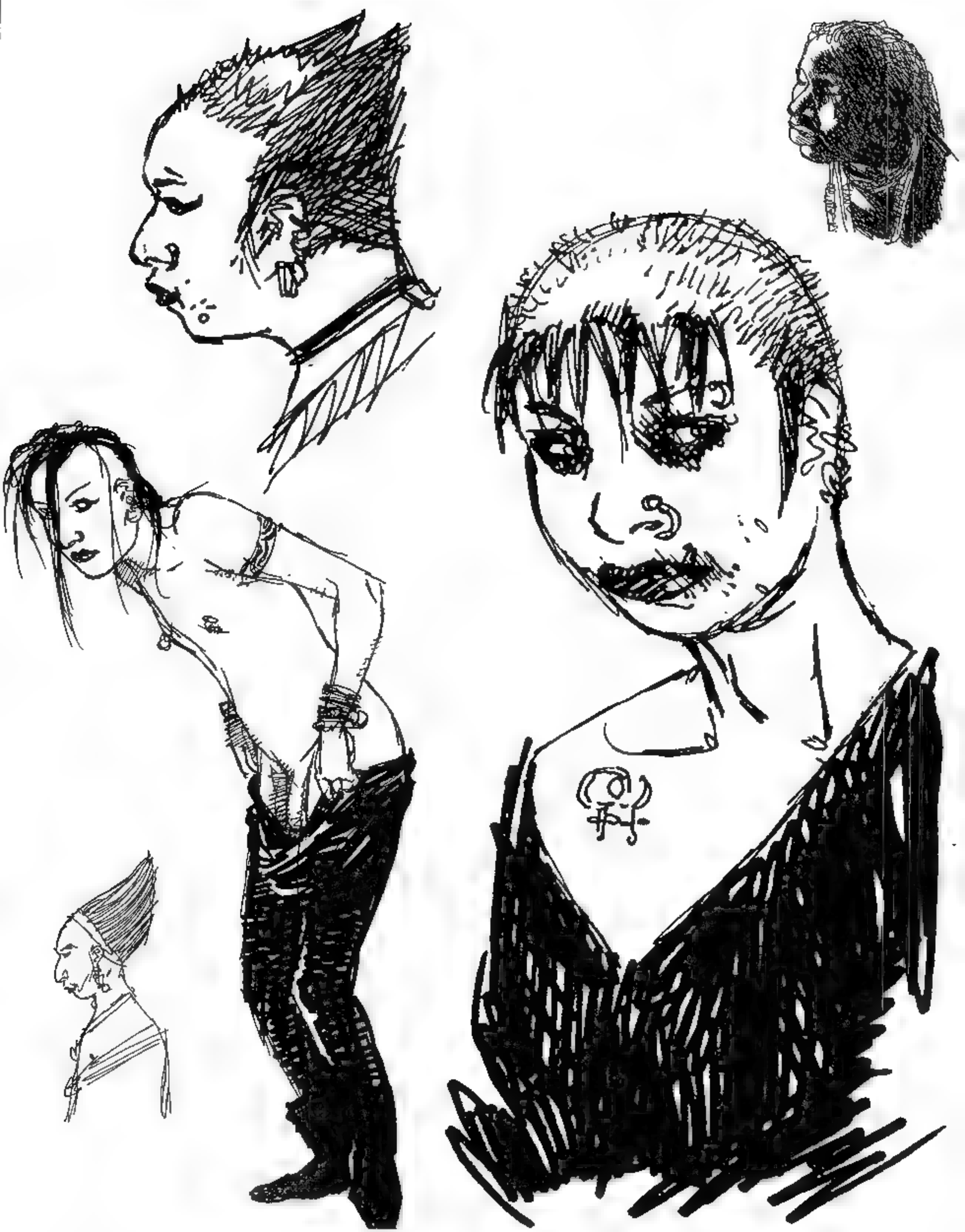
Consciously, Fisher doubtless did not realize any of this. But on the unconscious level, Fisher knew it with certainty. And rather than undermine Joe's image, Fisher shifted attention away from Joe and Li'l Abner to hillbillies in general. But he could not divert the vehemence of his outrage at Capp's having stolen his hero in order to ridicule everything he believed in. And so the accusation about the theft of the hillbilly motif became unconsciously invested with psychic energy drawn from the real cause of Fisher's anger, Capp's parody of Joe Palooka's triumphant goodness. That source of energy fueled Fisher's rage until it became hatred. Capp's satirical crusade corrupted conventional morality; Fisher had to stop it. And so he resorted to the smear tactics that eventually led to his ouster from NCS and, subsequently, to his own death.

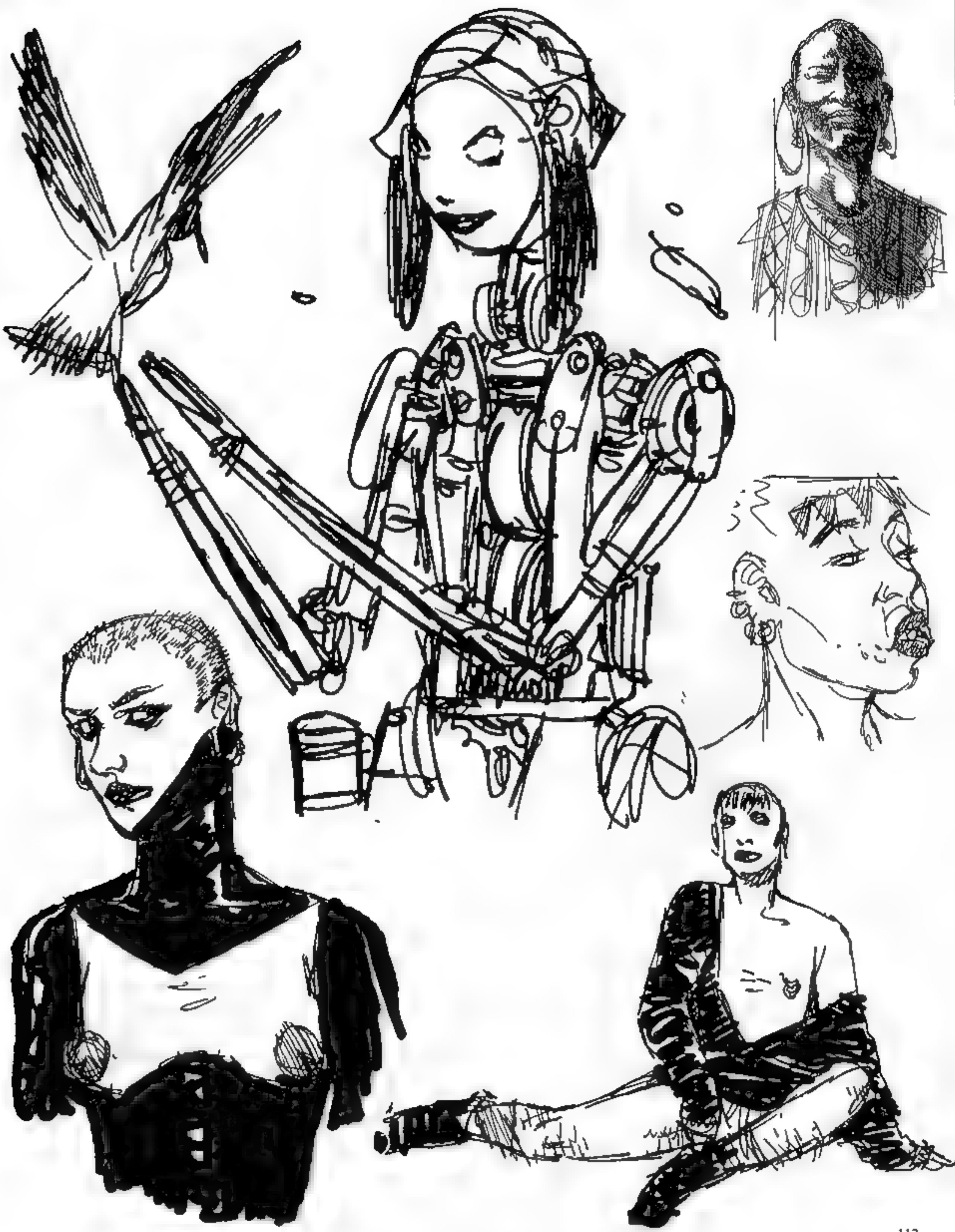
It is perhaps worth noting before leaving this aspect of the subject that Capp always spoke disparagingly about Li'l Abner, habitually calling him a stupid lout. He seemed to have a very low opinion of his protagonist. On the other hand, Fisher admired Joe Palooka. He loved him.

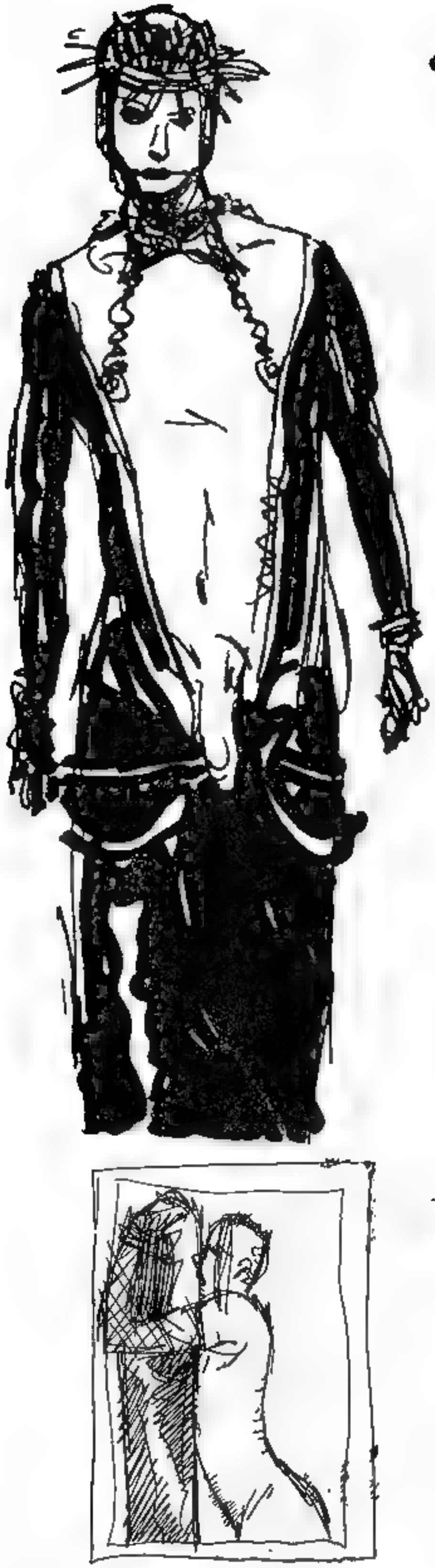
Perhaps now, with the publication of Clark's *Joe Palooka*, the Conspiracy can end. It should. We need to know the other Ham Fisher. By all reports, Fisher was an entertaining presence. In front of a crowd — large or small — he excelled. He could hold people spellbound with stories that would keep them rolling in the aisles. He controlled the room. And his stories in this book bear witness to this skill. They reveal a gifted storyteller at the height of his prowess. Don't miss it. ●

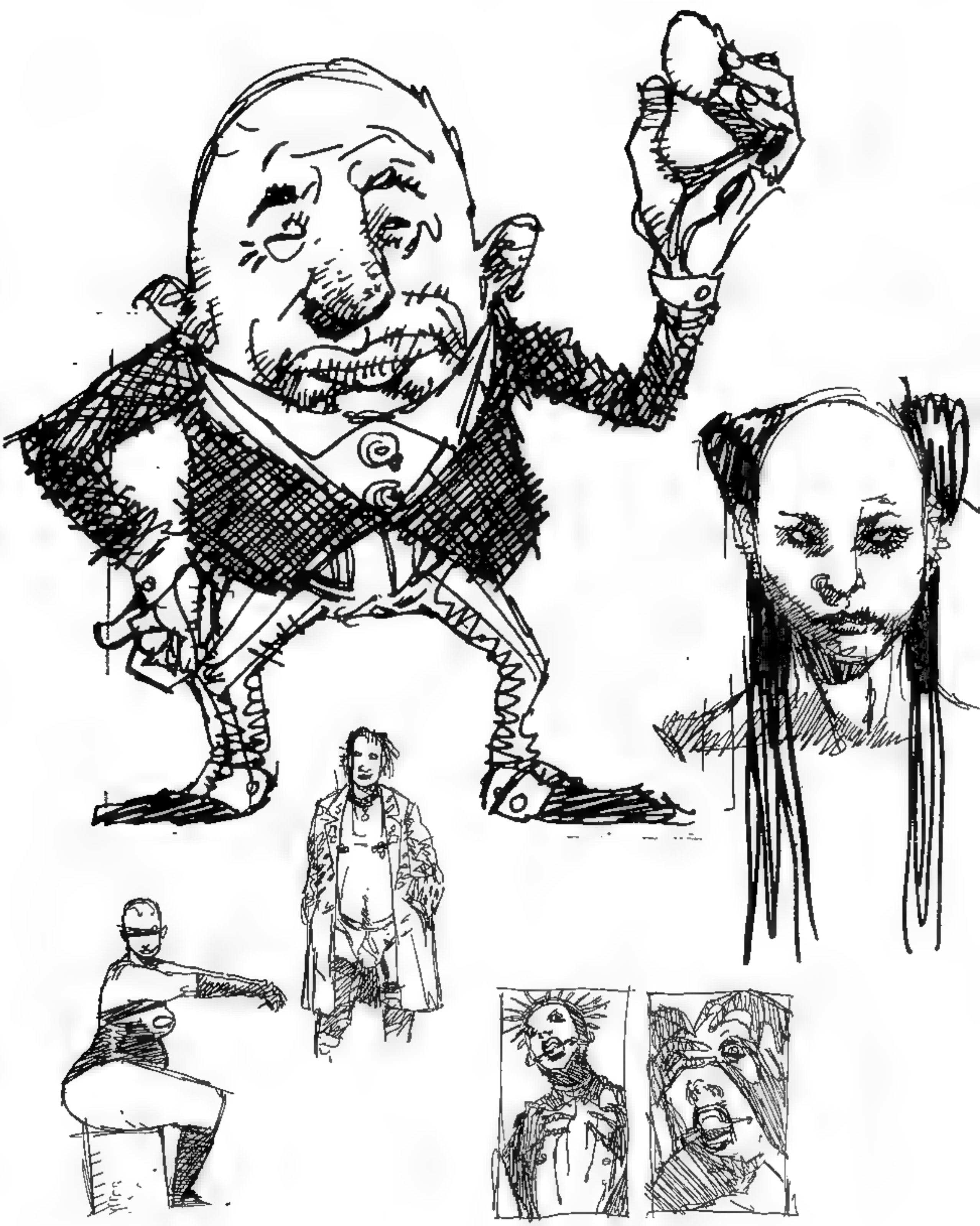
SKETCHBOOK

COMICS READERS WHO HAVE FOUND AND examined any one of the Caliber Press publications *Baker Street Sketchbook*, *Baker Street Graffiti*, or *Visions* already know that Guy Davis likes to draw, and that when he does he is more than likely to produce something worth looking at more than once. Likewise, readers who have read the Guy Davis-written-and-illustrated ten-issue run of *Baker Street* (co-created with Caliber publisher Gary Reed) know that Davis likes to make manifest in his art the blur between genders — *Baker Street* is the story of a sensitive young American girl who, for cash, plays the submissive Watson to a butch, punk female Sherlock Holmes, while in his second and most recent run as illustrator on DC's *Sandman Mystery Theatre* (a four-issue story entitled "The Vamp") Davis lends his art's subtle eroticism to a lesbian Louise Brooks look-alike tangled up in murder. Given that, the drawings here should please, if not surprise, those in the know about Guy Davis. To the rest of you, be prepared for sophisticated sexuality and fine draftsmanship in this short selection of loosely-worked impressions from the sketchbooks of an idiosyncratic and diligent talent. ●









l o o k w h a t y o u ' v

48 Eight pages of full color! Interviews with JEN WEIN and SAMUEL DELANEY. ($3.50)

51 FRANK BRUNNER'S angry farewell to Marvel, a pre-*Flaggr-Shadow-Black Kiss* interview with HOWARD CHAYKIN. ($3.50)

58 PASKO, SHOOTER, WEIN, WOLFMAN and EVANIER discuss comics writing; cover by FRANK MILLER. ($3.50)

59 Former *Heavy Metal* editor TED WHITE interviewed; covers by KEN MACKLIN and DENNIS FUJITAKE. ($3.50)

60 JIM SHOOTER interview with a

FRED HEMBECK cover, TEX AVERY memorial; the legacy of E.C., *RAW* magazine. ($3.50)

62 DICK GIORDANO interviewed; *Batman* cover; *Gay Comics* reviewed. ($3.50)

64 GIL KANE cover; debate between KANE and DENNY O'NEIL, plus *RAW* and slasher movies. ($3.50)

65 JACK KIRBY *Captain Victory* cover, FRANÇOISE MOULY and art spiegelman interviewed. ($3.50)

66 DC writer DENNY O'NEIL interviewed; RE D FLEMING reviewed. ($3.50)

68 Panel discussion with DENNY O'NEIL, FRANK MILLER, ROY THOMAS, LOUISE JONES, JULIUS SCHWARTZ, and more! ($3.50)

71 Great Popeye vs. the Hulk cover by PETER POPLASKI, interviews with MIKE FRIEDRICH and ROY THOMAS. ($3.50)

72 NEAL ADAMS is interviewed and provides a new cover; plus DR. SEUSS, *Asterix, Elfquest*. ($3.50)

73 CARL BARKS is cover featured with a long career retrospective; DC stalwart CURT SWAN interviewed. ($3.50)

74 *X-Men* cover; CHRIS CLAREMONT speaks; plus *RAW* debate with spiegelman and MOULY. ($3.50)

75 JAN STRNAD relates his "Brilliant Career at Marvel." JOHN BYRNE, JACK JACKSON, GIL KANE chat. Cover by KEVIN NOWLAN. ($3.50)

77 GIL KANE cover; interview with ARCHIE GOODWIN; FRANK MILLER and CHRIS CLAREMONT discuss Wolverine. ($3.50)

78 Interview with MAX ALLEN COLLINS; censorship panel featuring BIL GAINES, FRANK MILLER, JACK JACKSON, and others. ($3.50)

80 MARV WOLFMAN and GEORGE PEREZ interviews; CARTER SCHOLZ essay; *Little Orphan Annie*; and ELLISON. ($3.50)

82 DAVE and DENI SIM interviewed; the review of *Ronin*; BARRY MARZBERG's career reviewed by CARTER SCHOLZ, and half a SIM Cerebus cover. ($3.50)

83 DAVE SIM interview part two; reviews of *Gay Comix, Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book*; HARLAN ELLISON. ($3.50)

84 MICHAEL T. GILBERT interview and cover (of Eric and the Wraith) plus HARLAN ELLISON, RICK MARSCHALL, and much more. ($3.50)

86 Cover feature on *Tintin's* HERGE, ROBERT KANIGHER interviewed; *Love & Rockets* and *RAW* reviewed. ($3.50)

87 Anti-fight scenes article, with big, funny fight scene cover by DON ROSA; also, interviews with PHIL YEH and GEORGE METZGER. ($3.50)

88 Ratings debate panel discussions (involving JIM SHOOTER, MIKE GOLD, JAN STRNAD, more) and a hot editorial: *Killraven* reviewed. ($3.50)

89 WILL EISNER issue, with two interviews (one including FRANK MILLER), and article, and a new *Spirit* cover; plus CARTER SCHOLZ. ($3.50)

90 AL WILLIAMSON cover and interview; plus ELLISON, *Cerebus, RAW*, Howski Studios, Eclipse, Japanese comics, and more. ($4)

94 Special International issue! Featuring reports on Japanese, French, Argentinian and Malaysian comics. Cover by PEPPY WHITE. ($4)

95 A candid interview with Captain Marvel's C.C. Beck; a Women in Comics panel; Howard Nostrand's autobiography; and *Prince Valiant*. ($4)

96 DALE LUCIANO's "Newave" survey begins, with a great newave cover; an interview with HOWARD NOSTRAND, GARY GROTH on European comics. ($4)

97 HARVEY PEKAR is interviewed, written about, indexed, with a special R. CRUMB cover. Plus the Miss Buxley controversy; JIM SHOOTER's "little fucks" memo. ($4)

98 The Alternative Comics Cadaver Derby; ALEX TOTH and CLAY GEERDES interviewed; Newave Comics Survey. ($4)

99 What's wrong with the X-Men anyway? Also, an interview with ARN SABA, Archie Comics, and the premiere of SCOTT EDELMAN's "Ethics" column. ($4)

103 MICHAEL WM. KALUTA offers a *Starstruck Shadow* cover to front his interview. Plus STAN LEE and HARLAN ELLISON debate comics, literature, ethics, guns.. ($4)

104 Chats with SKIP WILLIAMSON and JUSTIN GREEN; R.C. HARVEY psychoanalyzes comics, CARTER SCHOLZ on *Savage Tales*; death in the industry. ($4)

108 In-depth interview with MILTON CANIFF; complete *Corto Maltese* episode by HUGO PRATT; plus reviews of *Hell on Earth, The Shadow*, more. ($4)

109 HOWARD CHAYKIN admits he has a "hard time with vigilantes," plus a look at the Dark Knight's dark side, and CARTER SCHOLZ on *American Flagg!* ($4)

110 MIKE BARON spills his guts, abetted by a DUDE cover; our readers on the JACK KIRBY art return controversy; and R. FIORE savages Fantagraphics. ($4)

111 HOWARD CRUSE talks about cartooning & being gay; DAN DAY speaks; the plight of a Soviet cartoonist, an examination of McGREGOR and myths. ($4)

113 Jam cover and dialogue between R. CRUMB and GIL KANE, EVANIER continues; HARVEY PEKAR on *Maus*; R. FIORE on censorship. ($5)

114 JAY LYNCH interview; JEFF ROVIN gives the inside scoop on Atlas Comics, *Dark Knight, Watchmen* reviewed. ($5)

115 Coverage of the *Journal*/HARLAN ELLISON vs. MICHAEL FLEISHER trial; transcripts of testimonies by ELLISON, JIM SHOOTER, and GROTH. 146 pages. ($5)

123 KIM DEITCH interview and cover. HARVEY PEKAR on the potential of comics; transcripts from the FRIENDLY FRANK's trial. ($5)

124 JULES FEIFFER discusses politics, critics, EISNER, cartooning, more; DAVID LEVINE cover. BERKE BREATHED defends his Pulitzer Summer Reading Lists. ($5)

125 BERKE BREATHED interviewed on comics and politics, how they mix, and more; BILL THE CAT. *Black Kiss* reviewed. ($5)

127 A truly rare BILL WATTERSON interview and charming full-color Spaceman Spiff cover; plus RALPH STEADMAN on cartooning and BRAD HOLLAND's sketchbook. ($5)

128 The International Spotlight illuminates DAVID LLOYD; SERGIO ARAGONES takes us around the world in 80,000 gags, and more. ($5)

130 A huge news section covers renewed media criticism of mature comics, and much more; GROTH comprehensively interviews *Cerebus'* DAVE SIM. ($5)

131 GARY GROTH accomplishes another *definitive* interview, with the inimitable RALPH STEADMAN. A classic conversation. ($5)

133 A knockout cover by JIM WOODRING opens the VIOLENCE IN COMICS issue, with interviews with

COMICS JOURNAL BACK ISSUES

e b e e n m i s s i n g

DR. THOMAS RADECK and DR. FREDRIC WERTHAM, and articles and reviews by B.N. DUNCAN, SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS, LEON HUNT, and C.C. BECK. ($5)

135 *Yummy Fur* creator CHESTER BROWN and Myron Moose creator BOB FOSTER interviewed; reviews by FRANK STACK, DARCY SULLIVAN, and MICHAEL DOOLEY; Mickey Mouse in the Third Reich. ($5)

136 VIETNAM issue, with interviews with *The 'Nam* writer DOUG MURRAY and *Vietnam Journal* creator DON LOMAX. More on the racist comics controversy. ($5)

137 CREATOR'S RIGHTS issue: an interview with SCOTT McCLOUD and STEVE BISSETTE, a panel discussion featuring BILL SIENKIEWICZ, BILL MARKS, STEVE SAFFEL, MARK

ASKWITH, STEVE BISSETTE, and GARY GROTH. Also, an interview with Mexico's RIUS. ($6)

138 Huge ALAN MOORE interview with a BILL SIENKIEWICZ cover; summer reading list, review of *Big Numbers*. ($6)

139 Interview with underground artist ALINE KOMINSKY-CRUMB by PETER BAGGE; part two of the three-part ALAN MOORE interview; a WEIRDO retrospective; sketchbook by LLOYD DANGLE! ($6)

140 SPECIAL WALT KELLY ISSUE featuring Kelly's last interview (1969) by GIL KANE, also, Kelly biography, rare sketches, and BILL WATTERSON on *Pogo*. Plus: Q&A with MAURICE SENDAK and the third part of the ALAN MOORE interview. ($5)

141 MATT GROENING, creator of *The Simpsons*, tells all. So does *Dirty Plotte* cartoonist JULIE DOUCET. GARY PANTER Sketchbook, too! ($6)

142 ARNOLD ROTH is interviewed about his 40-year-long career as a cartoonist/illustrator. Full of anecdotes about KURTZMAN, ELDER, et al. Also contains a CAROL TYLER interview and more PANTER sketches. ($5)

143 SPECIAL SEX ISSUE features interviews with R. CRUMB, ALAN MOORE, REED WALLER and KATE WORLEY[SOLD OUT!]s ANTON DREK. Plus essays on sex comics in Japan, attorney BOB LEVIN on censorship, and a brutally honest editorial by GARY GROTH on his reluctant involvement in the smut market.

144 TIM TRUMAN interview; underground legend JACK JACKSON on Western Comics, DAN CLOWES sketchbook and the 1991 Summer Reading List. ($6)

145 A lively EDDIE CAMPBELL interview highlights this jampacked issue; art spiegelman talks about the conclusion of *Maus* and the new *RAW* (also reviewed), JACK T. CHICK'S religious comics explored in an in-depth essay; GARY GROTH and KIM THOMPSON also contribute reviews of new comics! ($5)

146 SHARY FLENNIKEN talks about her controversial career in an interview; WILL EISNER ponders the future of the comics industry; fantastic first part of the KIM DEITCH sketchbook and a vintage essay on comics by poet DELMORE SCHWARTZ. ($5)

147 P. CRAIG RUSSELL discusses his career as one of comics' premiere fantasy artists; MARTIN WILLIAMS uncovers hidden smut in Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*; more of the indredible KIM DEITCH sketchbook. ($5)

148 *Big Baby's* CHARLES BURNS gives a rare, fascinating and funny interview; memoir of comics legend SHELDON MAYER, *Eightball* reviewed; report on alternative women

cartoonists in England; insane DOUG ALLEN/GARY LEIB sketchbook! ($5)

149 Special PANEL DISCUSSION issue brings you face-to-face with DAN CLOWES, art spiegelman, LOS BROS HERNANDEZ, BURNE HOGARTH, JEROME CHARYN, JULES FEIFFER, ROBERT HUGHES and many others!

Also, the debut of a new column about the small press, MINI-MALISM, a review of *Peep Show*, and more! ($5)

150 Massive, 156-page 150th issue special features two full-length interviews (with *Bleeding Heart's* PETER KUPER and *Xenozoic Tales'* MARK SCHULTZ), JAIME HERNANDEZ on secrets of cartooning, two sketchbooks (J.R. WILLIAMS and DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI) and SAMUEL JOYNER on his life as an African-America cartoonist. Read 'til you drop! ($7)

151 DREW FRIEDMAN gives a definitive interview, The Best Comics Shops in North America are profiled, and an ultra-rare sketchbook by Uncle Scrooge creator CARL BARKS. ($5)

152 The All-Mainstream Issue! Interview with a cover by *Spiderman/Spawn* millionaire TODD McFARLANE interviews with CHRIS CLAREMONT, ALAN MOORE, EVAN DORKIN, and DAVID MAZZUCHELLI. ($6)

154 Interview with *Eightball's* DAN CLOWES; museums of comics, LESLIE STERNBERGH on DORI SEDA's legacy, HUNT EMERSON sketchbook. ($6)

155 Interviews with *Sandman's* NEIL GAIMAN and *Coge's* DAVE McKEAN. Feature on bubblegum cards; reviews of DEITCH, *Gauntlet*. ($6)

156 Interviews with *Playboy* cartoonist GAHAN WILSON and *Steven* creator DOUG ALLEN; BOB LEVIN on the odyssey of *Zap #0*. ($6)

157 Comprehensive BILL GRIFFITH interview, special HARVEY KURTZMAN tribute section, ANNE RUBENSTEIN on Mexican comics, Reader's Poll results. ($6)

158 ED SOREL talks about his life and work. ROBERT CRUMB talks about his life and politics; and TYLER COHEN talks about feminism and *Naughty Bits*. ($6)

160 Special BLACK COMIC ARTISTS issue, featuring interviews with MILESTONE, SEITU HAYDEN, STAN SHAW, THE SIMS BROS., HO CHE ANDERSON and NABILE HAGE, plus loads of reviews and features. ($6)

161 ROBERT WILLIAMS talks about comics, cars, and art; MARK NEWGARDEN talks about comics, cards, and Nancy; RICHARD SALA sketches and doesn't talk. ($6)

162 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CARTOONISTS issue, featuring interviews with self-scrutinizing cartoonists HARVEY PEKAR, SETH, CHESTER BROWN, JOE MATT, DIANE NOOMIN, and DENNIS EICHHORN. FRANK STACK sketchbook. ($6)

163 Dizzying VERTIGO issue, featuring interviews with NEIL GAIMAN, TED McKEEVER; a special writer's roundtable with ANN NOCENTI, RACHEL POLLACK, NANCY COLLINS, and Vertigo chief KAREN BERGER, interview with *Cud* creator TERRY LABAN; a DAVE SIM sketchbook, and a cover by Vertigo veteran CHRIS BACHALO. ($6)

164 Special DOUBLE COVER issue featuring giant JIM WOODRING and MICHAEL ALLRED interviews, RICHARD PINI on the mass market, and a DAVE MCKEAN sketchbook. ($7)

165 MATT WAGNER and TOM TOMORROW interviews, an UNDERSTANDING COMICS panel, JAMMIN' THE TOONS — a history of cartoonist jams — and a DAN BURR sketchbook. ($6)

166 Part one of a gigantic, history-spanning BURNE HOGARTH interview, a talk with MARY FLEENER, and an eye-watering JILL THOMPSON sketchbook. ($6)

167 An interview with the Sultan of Slack, PAUL MAVRIDES, part two of the BURNE HOGARTH interview, a profile of the WORDS & PICTURES MUSEUM, and a special tribute section for JACK KIRBY featuring a back cover by JAIME HERNANDEZ. ($7)

PLEASE SEND ME the following back issues.
I've enclosed a check or money order for _____

#48 ($3.50)	#86 ($3.50)	#125 ($5)	#151 ($5)
#51 ($3.50)	#87 ($3.50)	#127 ($5)	#152 ($6)
#58 ($3.50)	#88 ($3.50)	#128 ($5)	#154 ($6)
#59 ($3.50)	#89 ($3.50)	#130 ($5)	#155 ($6)
#60 ($3.50)	#90 ($4)	#131 ($5)	#156 ($6)
#62 ($3.50)	#95 ($4)	#133 ($5)	#157 ($6)
#64 ($3.50)	#96 ($4)	#135 ($5)	#158 ($6)
#65 ($3.50)	#97 ($4)	#136 ($5)	#159 ($6)
#66 ($3.50)	#98 ($4)	#137 ($6)	#160 ($6)
#68 ($3.50)	#99 ($4)	#138 ($6)	#161 ($6)
#71 ($3.50)	#103 ($4)	#139 ($6)	#162 ($6)
#72 ($3.50)	#104 ($4)	#140 ($5)	#163 ($6)
#73 ($3.50)	#108 ($4)	#141 ($6)	#164 ($7)
#74 ($3.50)	#109 ($4)	#142 ($5)	#165 ($6)
#75 ($3.50)	#110 ($4)	#144 ($6)	#166 ($6)
#77 ($3.50)	#111 ($4)	#145 ($5)	#167 ($7)
#78 ($3.50)	#113 ($5)	#146 ($5)	
#80 ($3.50)	#114 ($5)	#147 ($5)	
#82 ($3.50)	#115 ($5)	#148 ($5)	
#83 ($3.50)	#123 ($5)	#149 ($5)	
#84 ($3.50)	#124 ($5)	#150 ($7)	

Prices include postage.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE/ZIP _____

Send to: JOURNAL BACK ISSUES, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115

THE COMICS JOURNAL HIT LIST

Ever go into the comics shop and stare forlornly at the shelves as you silently wonder, "Don't any good comics ever come out?" Believe it or not, they do. As a public service, we offer this feature, in which we've picked our favorites of the current funnybook crop. May this help you in your search for worthwhile comics.

THE BALLAD OF DOCTOR RICHARDSON

PAUL POPE

HORSE PRESS

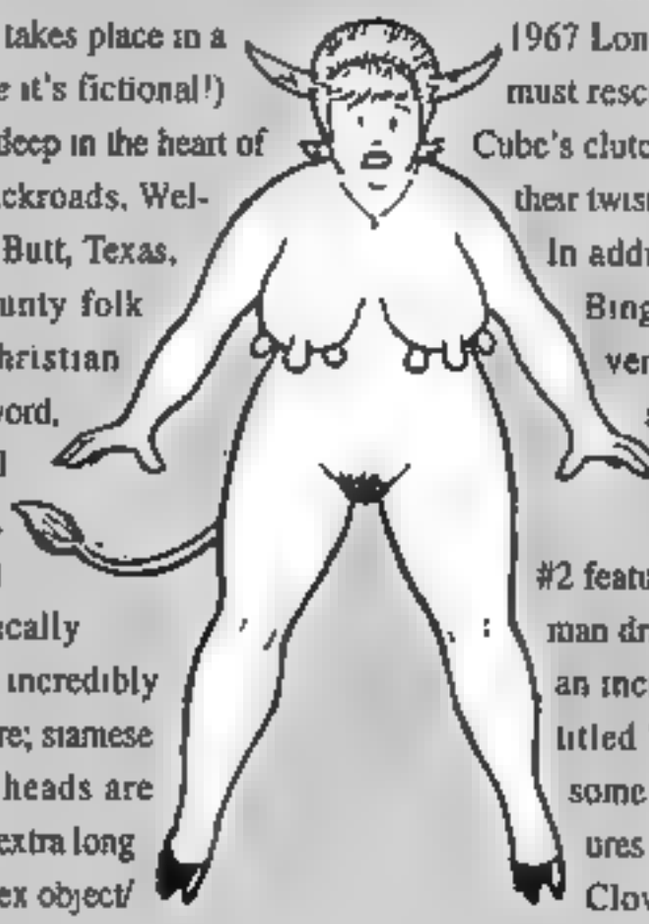
Paul Pope, the creator of the superb graphic novel *Sin Titulo*, has outdone himself with his new work, *The Ballad of Doctor Richardson*. On the back, under the price (a bargain at $9.95 for 114 pages), he's written the description "A Drawn Novel," and it's one of the few comics that can legitimately claim to be such a thing. The story follows twelve hours in the life of Dr. Richardson, a shy art history professor, during which his lonely existence changes dramatically. It begins with Dr. Richardson giving his class their final exam, then follows him as he endures his colleagues' barbs regarding his lack of published material, returns home to his exams and his cat, and eventually goes out on an aimless subway ride to ruminate on his state of being. On the train, a female former student of his strikes up a conversation, and though he is tongue-tied and awkward, on a basic level he manages to recognize his destiny in Noel and pursue her. This spare plot description does not do justice to Pope's subtle, elegant writing, however, and the story transcends any predictability with its beautiful, contemplative atmosphere. Pope's confident black-and-white artwork integrates seamlessly into the narrative, seemingly rough but actually exquisitely crafted, recalling Eddie Campbell, David Mazzucchelli, and maybe a little Jacques Tardi. Paul Pope here proves himself to be an exceptionally gifted cartoonist, and with any luck we can look forward to many more gems from him in the future. (*Ballad* is available from Horse Press, P.O. Box 3112, Columbus, OH 43210-0112.) **SN**

THE MUTANT BOOK OF THE DEAD

MACK WHITE

STARHEAD COMIX

The coolest comic I've seen lately comes from that nut Mack White. You've probably seen his stuff in *Heavy Metal* and *Snake Eyes*, but I believe this is his first all-Mack solo book, and boy, is it weird! It's called *The Mutant Book of The Dead* and it takes place in a fictional county (God, I *hope* it's fictional!) somewhere in the Bible Belt, deep in the heart of Texas, reachable only by backroads. Welcome to Chester county (Ox Butt, Texas, to be specific). Chester county folk are supposedly decent Christian "people," for lack of a better word, who still practice traditional family values (school prayer, community participation, etc.) but there's one catch — practically everyone in the area is an incredibly strange and ugly freak of nature; siamese sextuplets, mutants whose heads are shaped like Texas, geeks with extra long necks or extra heads, and the sex object/love interest of the book is a human-cow halfbreed with extra nipples. In spite of all this weirdness, there's plenty of the sex-sin-guilt-morality thing going on between witch-burning rituals, town snake roasts, and local beauty queen contests. Haven't I said enough?! Get this thing and read it, the art's terrific, and Mack White rules. You'll wonder what *he* looks like. **PM**



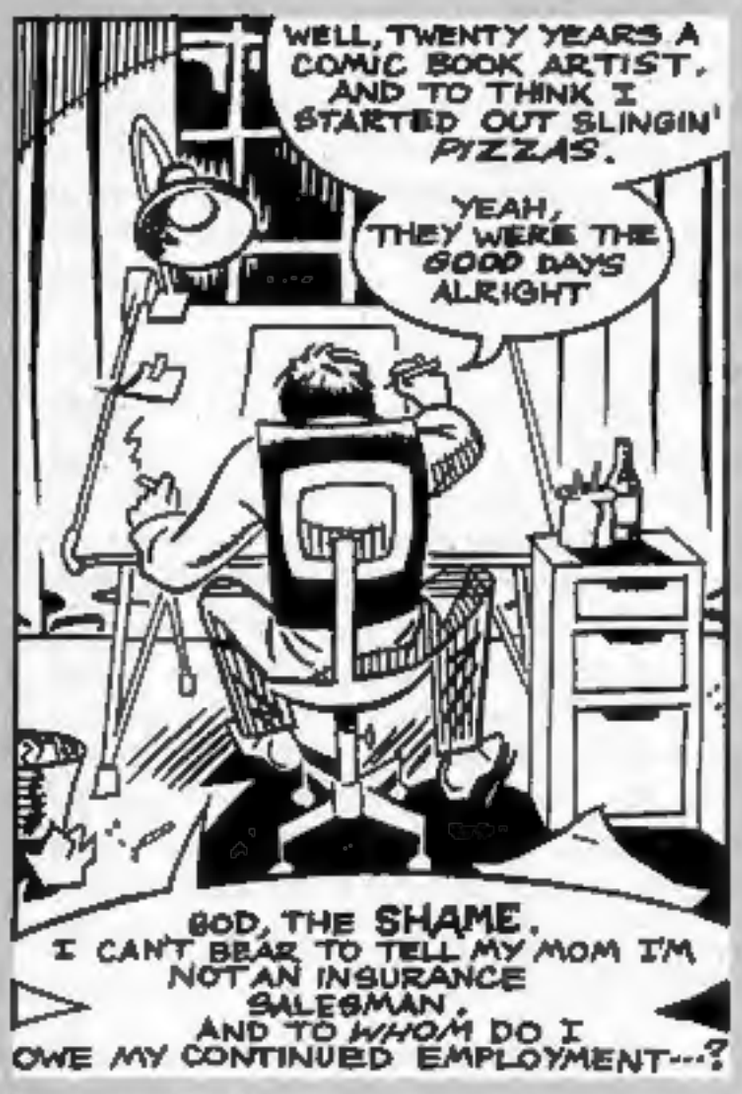
NERVOUS TALES #1-2

CASPAR WILLIAMS

SENSITIVE COMICS

From Britain comes Caspar Williams' *Nervous Tales*, a curious new one-man anthology in the tradition of Dan Clowes' *Lloyd Llewellyn*. Like its more famous precursor, *Nervous Tales* is steeped in late-'50s and early '60s American pop culture. But where *Lloyd* relied on disaffection and anxiety as its driving forces, *Nervous Tales* seems more bemused and innocent in its unselfconscious appropriation of the whole *gestalt* of beatniks, mods, gray flannel suits, and rockers. The backbone of the comic thus far is the continuing serial "Love International," which follows the adventures of the eponymous group of hep crusaders as they fight the forces of square (personified in the sinister organization the Cube) in 1967 London — in their first serial they must rescue the Rolling Stones from the Cube's clutches and save Bill Wyman from their twisted Bobbitt-style "trophy" plans. In addition, issue #1 has a neophyte Bing-Crosby look-alike's first adventure with hash in "Looking," and several one-page gag strips, including the highly amusing "Virtual Reality Boy." Issue #2 features the psychotic organization-man drama "I, Marty Weintraub!" and an incisive early-Marvel parody entitled "Hack!" Williams' art shows some Clowes influence, but his figures display far more animation than Clowes', as do his panel layouts. With its eye on the past and its sharp, jazzy graphic style, *Nervous Tales* is poised to become a breakout title for the British small press.

L I S T



Here's hoping it leads to more. (You can get #1 ($2.50) and #2 ($2.95) from Caspar Williams, 15, Montpelier Road, Brighton, BN1 2LQ, England.)**SN**

ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY #1

CHRIS WARE

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

The premier issue of this title features "Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth," a character from Ware's strips in the Chicago paper *New City*. Several color strips have been retrofitted for the comic book format while the book's heart contains a longer Corrigan tale in elegant black, white, and blue. From cover to cover, this comic is surely one of the classiest, smartest, and most fully realized "total packages" to come along in recent memory.

Through Corrigan, Ware has created a haunting and complex mosaic of sights, feelings, and circumstances that are foreign yet uncomfortably reminiscent. Ware's art is a daring yet sublimely confident synthesis of congenital cartooning, psychologically charged symbolism, fine art ambition, and sheer design savvy. The graphics, intentionally skewed, cooly distanced, and stylistically inventive, are a perfect match for the succinctly stilted dialogue that reverberates in the vast space between bodies. Together in fractured lockstep, they advance what the cover calls "an indefensible attempt to justify the despair of those who have never known real tragedy" (although perhaps "to perform an autopsy on" that despair would be more accurate). The marvel is that we are moved to a genuine emotional response by a sad character for whom no sympathy was ever asked. Even the cries of our (nervous) laughter have been foreshadowed, previously co-opted, by the curious, pathetic, and familiar figure. The book may be something of a one-note, but that single, unwavering pitch is held so long and so perfectly that the comic remains an altogether unique and powerful experience. **RK**

BOOM BOOM #1

DAVID LASKY

ÆON

Longtime mini-comics artist and Xeric award-winner David Lasky joins the impressive line up of alternative artists at ÆON with *Boom Boom #1*, not to be confused with the self-published mini-comic of the same name. Following a forgettable introduction by art critic Ed Brubaker, Lasky launches into the feature story, "Portrait of Ella." At first glance this appears to be another mundane autobiographical tale of the pathetic-cartoonist-that-can't-get-laid genre. On closer inspection, however, the story is oddly compelling and poignant. Lasky's use of innovative narrative and graphic construction, as well as a metaphorical subplot, keeps the comic moving at a brisk pace. While it is readily apparent that there is room for improvement in the artwork, *Boom Boom* is an excellent first effort in the comic-sized format for this promising young talent. **LR**

TOMATO #1

ELLEN FORNEY

STARHEAD COMIX

I know, I know. It seems decidedly passé at this point in our insular culture of alternative comix to take time to laud yet another dabbler in autobiographical cartooning. It's not my fault, however, that Ellen Forney didn't get into this business five or ten years ago.

Cultivating her talents for the past few years in the pages of *Real Stuff*, *Duplex Planet*, and most recently *Diva*, Forney has bravely has set out with *Tomato* to convincingly establish herself as a comix artist with a future. That is not to say, of course, that *Tomato* isn't, well, ripe or ruddy enough. Actually, it's a engagingly mature romp undeserved of such bad puns.

Forney's work is sensual and intemperate, probably sensual through its intemperance. The opening strip is charming yet alarming, establishing a powerfully defined female point of view that, without any use of text, is impressively inclusive mther than the opposite. This first strip reads like an open invitation to revel in the exhibitionism that ensues for the next 20 or so pages. "Don't be embarrassed" seems to be the message, encouraging a healthy, public enjoyment of otherwise highly personal material.

It is this exhibitionist quality which makes *Tomato* #1 so good. Forney clearly enjoys showing off, and it's done in such a way that doesn't put her at odds with the reader. There's no crude, uncomfortable, idiosyncratic masturbatory techniques à la some other cartoon autobiographers. Just fun, personal anecdotes (like "My Date With Camille Paglia") that aren't so personal they shouldn't be told. It's a bit like getting a letter from your best friend and reading all about the latest juicy gossip, told with a self-, and reader, respect that belies any cries of sensationalism. **ER**

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

RISE AND SHINE

At last, Gary Groth delivers the definitive interview with *Sandman* creator **NEIL GAIMAN** — don't miss this historic meeting of industry powerhouses, or the beautiful cover portrait by **MICHAEL ZULLI**. There'll also be interviews with longtime DC staffer **SOL HARRISON** and the Italian cartooning genius **HUGO PRATT**, and more news and reviews than you can shake a stick at.

The Comics Journal #169! — Coming in July!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

12 issues of Roberta Gregory's **NAUGHTY BITS** are available for $3.00 each from Fantagraphics Books (7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle WA 98115; write or call 1-800-657-1100 and ask for a free catalog). Also from Fantagraphics is the brand-new **A BITCH IS BORN**, a softcover collection of the history of Bitchy Bitch ($9.95). You can get **DYNAMITE DAMSELS** ($2.50), **SHEILA AND THE UNICORN** ($6.00), **WINGING IT** ($10.00), and **ARTISTIC LICENTIOUSNESS** #1 ($3.00) and #2 ($3.50) directly from Roberta Gregory, P.O. Box 27438, Seattle, WA 98125.

The amount of **ELFQUEST** material extant staggers the imagination. Call 1-800-288-2131 (or 718-984-3398 outside of the U.S.) to order or get prices on all of the many reprint albums, comics, anthologies, music, and various other elf-flavored merchandise, or send a SASE to ElfQuest Catalog, Publishers Book & Audio, P.O. Box 070059, Staten Island, NY 10307. In addition, **ELFQUEST: NEW BLOOD**, **ELFQUEST: BLOOD OF TEN CHIEFS**, **ELFQUEST: HIDDEN YEARS**, **ELFQUEST: WAVE DANCERS**, **ELFQUEST: REBELS**, and **ELFQUEST: JINK** are in comic stores everywhere for $2.00 each.

Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's **FROM HELL** Vols. 1-4 are available from Kitchen Sink (320 Riverside Drive, Northampton, MA 01060 — write or call them at 1-800-365-7465) for $4.95 each.

Grant Morrison and Jon J. Muth's **THE MYSTERY PLAY** is in your local comic shop right now for $19.95 (hardcover) from DC/Vertigo.

Jaime Hernandez's **WIGWAM BAM** ($14.95 softcover) and Gilbert Hernandez's **LOVE & ROCKETS X** ($11.95 softcover) can be had from Fantagraphics. Both books are also available in hardcover ($35.00) or signed hardcover ($39.95) editions.

CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

ANDREW CRAIG *is a graduate of the College of Wooster, a student of Japanese language and culture, and an all-around* bon vivant. *He has just finished an internship at Fantagraphics Books.*

R.C. HARVEY *of Champaign, Illinois, is a one-time associate member of the National Cartoonists Society, a sometime freelance magazine cartoonist, and a lapsed member of Sigma Delta Chi. He is the editor of two volumes of* Cartoons of the Roaring Twenties *from Fantagraphics books.*

PETER KUPER, *whose illustrations appear regularly in* The New York Times, Time, *and* The Village Voice, *among others, is co-founder of the comix anthology* World War Three Illustrated. *His other collections include* New York, New York, Comics-Trips, *and* Bleeding Heart. *His newest comic series,* Wild Life, *is published by Fantagraphics.*

NG SUAT TONG *is a Singaporean studying for his medical degree in Scotland. Apart from reading comics, he spends some time contemplating the inner workings of alternative Christian music.*

ERIC REYNOLDS *feels blessed to be a part of the ever-bucolic Fantagraphics family. Bless him more by purchasing his first comics work, in* Brain Candy *#1, from Counterculture Comics.*

ANNE RUBENSTEIN *is about to finish a Ph.D. in Latin American history at Rutgers University after only six years of graduate school. Her dissertation is about comic books, censorship, and conservative politics in Mexico, 1934-1976.*

ROBERT E. SANDIFORD *is a freelance writer with a BA in English Literature from McGill University, where he won the Lionel Shapiro Award for creative writing in 1990.*

ED SHANNON *proudly admits that his first professional publication appeared in* Centrifugal Bumble-Puppy *#7. He is a lecturer at North Carolina State University, where he teaches composition and American Literature. He has essays on comics upcoming in* The Journal of Popular Culture *and* The Mid-Atlantic Almanack. *He writes a quasi-semi-regular column on comics for an arts weekly in Raleigh, where he lives with his wonderful wife and amazing son.*

CONRAD L. STINNETT III *has an MS from Illinois State University. He has been an educational administrator, a freelance journalist, a comics retailer, and currently serves as marketing director for Warp Graphics. This is his first contribution to* The Comics Journal.

ADVERTISERS INDEX

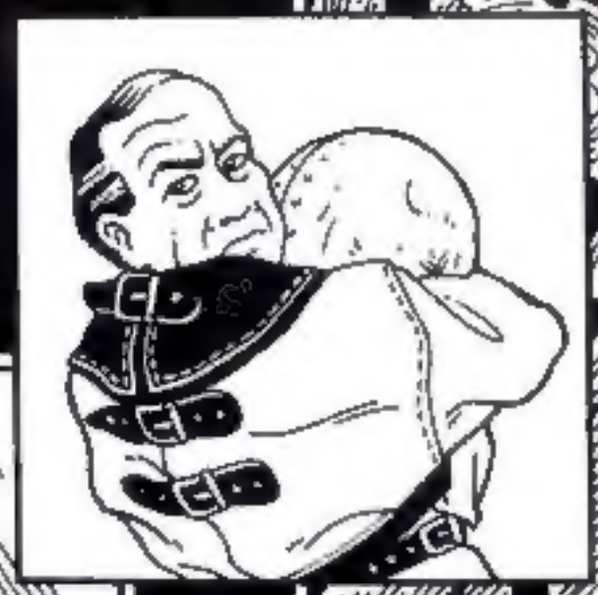
Adhesive Comics 10
ÆON 100
Aiiie! Comics 46
Alpha Productions . 32
Associated Printers 44
Cartoon Art Museum 76
Cat-Head Comics .. 23
Comic Culture 76
Dark Horse 20
Estrus Records 10
Fantagraphics Books .. 29, 34, 75, 89
Forbidden 3-D 27
Four Color Images 40
Garrett Izumi 21
Heavy Metal 14
Human Computing . 9
Hysteria 19
M-PYRE 76
Malpractice Graphix 10
Meet Danny Ocean 28
NBM ..... IFC
Onli Studios 10
Penny Dreadful Press ..... IBC
Star Clipper Books 76
Studio Daedalus 22
Words & Pictures Museum 31

COPYRIGHTS

Front cover, pp. 1b, 66-71, 72c, 73-74 © 1994 Roberta Gregory; pp. 1a, 111-116 © 1994 Guy Davis; Back cover, pp. 1c, 77-84, 86-88, 90-97 © 1994 Warp Graphics; pp. 4a © 1994 Mark Martin; pp. 4b © 1994 Mike Baron; pp. 4c © 1994 Larry Marder; pp. 5a © 1994 Nickolodeon; pp. 5c © 1994 David Chelsea; pp. 5d © 1994 Michael Allred; pp. 6 © 1994 Harvey Pekar, Frank Stack, and Joyce Brabner; pp. 2 © 1994 Burne Hogarth; pp. 7 © 1994 Dan Clowes; pp. 11 © 1994 Raging Rhino Productions; pp. 13 © 1994 Peter Kuper; pp. 15 © 1994 Clay Bennett; pp. 16-18, 20-21 © 1994 Michael Diana; pp. 22 © 1994 Burton Joseph; pp. 25 © 1994 Denis Kitchen; pp. 31 © 1994 Voyager; pp. 32 © 1994 Estate of Walter Lantz; pp. 33 © 1994 Kim Deitch; pp. 36 © 1994 Becky Wilson; pp. 36 © 1994 Will Eisner; pp. 38a © 1994 Jeff Smith; pp. 38b © 1994 Don Punchatz; pp. 39 © 1994 Revolutionary Comics; pp. 41a © 1994 R.L. Crabb; pp. 41b © 1994 Mario Hernandez; pp. 42a © 1994 Jaime Lutes; pp. 42b © 1994 David Carrino and Peter Bagge; pp. 42c © 1994 Robert Crumb; pp. 43 © 1994 Peter David and George Perez; pp. 44 © 1994 Julie Doucet; pp. 42d, 47-48 © 1994 Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell; pp. 49-51 © 1994 Grant Morrison and Jon J. Muth; pp. 52-63 © 1994 Gilbert Hernandez; pp. 64-65 © 1994 Jaime Hernandez; pp. 101-105 © 1994 Estate of Hum Fisher; pp. 106-110 © 1994 Capp Enterprises, Inc.; pp. 72a © 1994 Colin Upton; pp. 72b © 1994 Donna Barr; pp. 85 © 1994 Republic Pictures Corporation; pp. 89 © 1994 EC Publications; pp. 116a,b © 1994 Paul Pope; pp. 116c,d © 1994 Mack White; pp. 114a, 118a © 1994 Caspar Williams; pp. 118b,c © 1994 Chris Ware; pp. 119d © 1994 David Lasky; pp. 116e,f © 1994 Ellen Forney; pp. 120 © 1994 Jill Thompson.

"FANTASTIC!"

"JASON LUTES IS A WORLD-CLASS STORYTELLER AND HIS FIRST GRAPHIC NOVEL IS AN INSTANT CLASSIC."
— SCOTT MCCLOUD (UNDERSTANDING COMICS)



JAR of FOOLS

PART ONE
BY JASON LUTES

EIGHTY PAGES OF HYPNOTIC VISUAL FICTION

PERFECT-BOUND AND PRINTED ON VELLUM STOCK
$5.95 • MATURE READERS • SHIPPING IN JUNE 1994

Penny Dreadful Press

104 14TH AVENUE EAST, SUITE F
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON • 98112

THE COMICS JOURNAL

The Magazine of Comics News & Criticism

Number 168

MIKE DIANA CONVICTED ON OBSCENITY CHARGES

AN INTERVIEW WITH *NAUGHTY BITS* CREATOR ROBERTA GREGORY

RICHARD & WENDY PINI

Fifteen Years of Elfquest